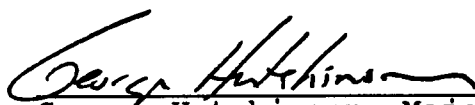
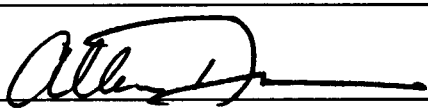
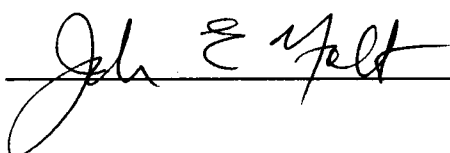


To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by James David Taylor entitled "'who nailed words to their primitive senses': Naming and Narrative Layering in Thoreau's Natural Histories." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctorate of Philosophy with a major in English.


George Hutchinson, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:

Accepted for the Council:


Associate Vice Chancellor
and Dean of The Graduate School

"'who nailed words to their primitive senses':

Naming and Narrative Layering

in Thoreau's Natural Histories"

A Dissertation

Presented for the

Doctorate of Philosophy

Degree

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

James David Taylor

August, 1994

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wife

Johanna L. Taylor

whose patience, kindness, and love
have taught and continue to teach me daily
and

Korey, our child-about-to-be.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines Thoreau's natural histories ("Natural History of Massachusetts," "A Walk to Wachusett," "A Winter Walk," *The Maine Woods*, "The Succession of Forest Trees," "Walking," "Autumnal Tints," "Wild Apples") in light of their individual historical contexts, with an emphasis on their evolving narrative methods. Thoreau's natural history writing is essentially an act of naming: a naming which increasingly takes into account more variables of his historical context as well as the historical context of the object (its unique myths, nomenclatures and evolutionary background) in order to approximate a more accurate name for the natural object. Thoreau's multifaceted means of naming, in its desire and yet inability to merge conflicting perspectives, creates a narrative of friction in which Thoreau seeks to create himself as both neutral nomenclator and mimetic participant. As he becomes increasingly aware of his inability to merge these discordant acts of naming and to accurately describe the natural world, the method of narration in each of his natural histories becomes increasingly layered.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

"A Walk to Wachusett"	"AWW"
"A Winter Walk"	"Walk"
"Autumnal Tints"	"AT"
"Natural History of Massachusetts"	"NHM"
"The Allegash and the East Branch"	"Allegash"
"The Succession of Forest Trees"	"SFT"
"Wild Apples"	"WA"

Chapter I

Introduction

Where is the literature which gives expression to Nature? He would be a poet who could impress the winds and streams into his service, to speak for him; who nailed words to their primitive senses, as farmers drive down stakes in the spring, which the frost has heaved; who derived his words as often as he used them,--transplanted them to his page with earth adhering to their roots....

("Walking," H. D. Thoreau)

Things in their immediacy are unknown and unknowable, not because they are remote or behind some impenetrable veil of sensation of ideas, but because knowledge has no concern with them. For knowledge is a memorandum of conditions of their appearance, concerned, that is, with sequences, coexistences, relations. Immediate things may be pointed to by words, but not described or defined. Description when it occurs is but a part of a circuitous method of pointing or denoting (John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*)

"... whose words embellish countless calendars, posters, and collections of photographs." (Robert Sattlemeyer, "Introduction," *Thoreau's Natural Histories*)

Recognizing the importance of landscape in human history and in literary texts has become commonplace in the last twenty to thirty years of literary, philosophical, and historical scholarship. Previous criticism has discussed at length notions of the pastoral, romantic wilderness, naturalism (nature as indifferent and harsh) and such, but criticism has focused far more on the literary style of the text in order to place it into a canonical framework than on closely examining the literal landscape of a specific locale and time and the cultural constructions used to describe it.¹ Responding to this perceived gap in

¹ This change parallels that of literary criticism's movement away from New Criticism (perhaps is an intellectual byproduct). Terry Eagleton says of New Criticism's view of interpretation:

Meaning was public and objective, inscribed in the

criticism, relatively new disciplines of scholarship have emerged which define their work by a particular focus on landscape (such as environmental history, green or ecocriticism, and ecofeminism).² All methods of criticism necessarily privilege certain authors over others. So, too, within ecocriticism there are some authors who are readily mentioned as precursors of a modern, biocentric perspective toward the environment; also, there are other authors who represent a particular brand of thinking which has brought about environmental ruin and/or alienation from nature.³ It is also apparent that such an approach to

very language of the literary text, not a question of some putative ghostly impulse in a long-dead author's head, or the arbitrary private significances a reader might attach to his words. (48 *Literary Theory: An Introduction*) Deconstructionist critics pointed out that such a hermeneutics ignores the milieu in which the text is read, the historical concerns of and influences on the author, and, of course, the cultural background of the reader. Ecocriticism also reflects similar values by stressing the importance of the cultural constructions of nature in the text and by the reader instead of focusing on the text's similarities with accepted genres and literary movements.

² Some excellent discussions of ecocriticism are Glen Love's *"Et in Arcadia Ego: Pastoral Theory"* and Cheryll Burgess-Glodfelty's *"Literary Studies and Environmental Issues: An Introduction to Ecocriticism."* As these studies openly explain, ecocriticism is certainly a broad, gangly term that groups very disparate types criticism: some polemic, others disinterested in ecological applications of the scholarship. This is certainly a weakness in this type of criticism but perhaps, too, it is the strength of ecocriticism--that it has yet to be philosophically confined to set parameters.

³ It isn't hard to make this split, particularly in American literature. The positive figures are obvious: Thoreau, Muir, Austin, Leopold, Abbey, Dillard, etc... On the other hand, examples of negative criticisms are Carolyn

literature privileges those texts which focus carefully on the landscape inhabited in the text; thus, pastoral themes, some exploration literature, Romantic poetry, frontier novels and, more recently, the nature essay are the most commonly discussed varieties of literature.

Henry David Thoreau is undoubtedly the most heralded of American nature essayists.⁴ Perhaps more than any other writer Thoreau achieves a crossover success between traditional criticism, green criticism, and wide recognition in popular culture. While much of Thoreau's writing is concerned with issues not related to the landscape, the majority of critical and popular response to Thoreau has to do with his natural descriptions. The reasons for this are apparent. The only book-sized texts that Thoreau saw to completion during his life were *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* (1849) and *Walden* (1854), both of which are ostensibly about the human

Merchant's *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (1980) which targets scientists, such as Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes, as the philosophical starting point for alienation from nature and Max Oelschlaeger's *The Idea of Wilderness: From Prehistory to the Age of Ecology* (1991) which furthers this argument, yet also points to Emerson's philosophy as another method of alienation in which nature becomes merely human symbol.

⁴ This point is really self-evident. One need only look at which "nature writers" have cross-over value to popular culture. Eighteenth-century natural historians, such as Mark Catesby or William Bartram, are being studied within the academy yet are virtually ignored by a popular readership, whereas, nineteenth- and twentieth-century writers like John Muir and Aldo Leopold have a strong popular culture audience yet garner little scholarly study.

relationship to nature. These texts lend themselves easily to lit-crit interpretation by their structural framework and their rhetorical style.⁵ Also, Thoreau creates a narrator in these texts who participates in and at times defines many contemporary American cultural stereotypes which resonate with a popular readership: notions of self-reliance, the individual leaving civilization to discover himself, and the importance of a frontier to an American identity.⁶

Numerous daily planners, calendars, posters, etc. depict a nature scene with often the same one-liners from Thoreau: "In Wildness is the preservation of the World" or "Contact! Contact!" For example, Eliot Porter's *In Wildness is the Preservation of the World* (1962) is a collection of Porter's photographs with Thoreau quotations either from published texts or journal entries, yet makes no distinction between the landscape photographed and Thoreau's words. This type of presentation establishes a homogeneity of Thoreau's descriptions of the landscape. This homogeneity is marketed by varied interests (the

⁵ Until recently, the focus of criticism on these texts has been on the formulaic structure Thoreau imposes on his experiences. This emphasis on unity within the texts has overshadowed the cultural heritage from which Thoreau wrote. Recent critics, such as Joan Burbick and H. Daniel Peck, have done much to redirect Thoreau scholarship to the complexity of his texts and the importance of his cultural background.

⁶ R. B. Lewis' *The American Adam* (5).

Sierra Club, manufacturers of outdoor sporting goods, even the National Park Service) for its own purposes--sometimes with ecological concerns, sometimes with profit or political motives.

Yet, literary scholarship, too, has reinforced this perspective by focusing primarily on Thoreau's two major works and the consistency or unity of style, rather than closely examining his differing methods of description in these and other works, particularly his natural histories. This mono-vision of Thoreau's writing about the landscape has caused readers to valorize him as either the prototypical nature-essayist to scholars or as a sort of nature/ecologist prophet to popular culture.⁷ Because of this valorization, readers of Thoreau often ignore the ideological shifts, as well as complexities, changes, and downright contradictions in the literary methods he explores in his descriptions of landscape. I will be paying particular attention to Thoreau's growing awareness

⁷ Peter A. Fritzell's *Nature Writing in America: Essays on a Cultural Type* exemplifies this sort of scholarship using *Walden* as an Ur-text by which all subsequent nature writing must be judged. Robert Sattlemeyer's introduction to his collection *The Natural History Essays: Henry David Thoreau* (1980) discusses the popular perception of Thoreau as nature writer:

Americans in the late twentieth century, who work very hard at cultivating leisure, are probably more willing than Thoreau's contemporaries were to grant him the broad margin of free time that he required; and his advocacy of the wild as a necessary complement to civilized has made him something of an environmental oracle (ix)

of the inadequacy of language in these descriptions.

Thoreau's active writing years (1842-62) span a period of great upheaval in both American literature and science. Nowhere is this more evident than in the British and American natural histories most commonly read at that time. In fact, during the first half of the nineteenth century the idea of what comprised natural history changed. Lynn Barber states of British natural history:

...natural history does not mean quite the same now as it meant then ..., and it did not mean the same at the beginning of the nineteenth century as it meant at the end. The most important difference is that, in the early decades of the nineteenth century, it still theoretically meant the study of the three kingdoms of Nature, animal, vegetable and mineral, and therefore included geology, as much as botany and zoology, in its purview. By the time [Darwin] published the *Origin of Species*, in 1859, such eclecticism was already somewhat rare, and most of the serious scientists were beginning to specialize, and to call themselves by names (botanist, geologist, and the like) that indicated their specialty. It was not that they spurned the name of naturalist, but rather that they felt that they could not honestly claim it. (27)

American natural history similarly changed. By the 1840's American science was becoming more specialized, and those

newly entering the field saw the necessity for specialization. Thomas Smallwood points out in *Natural History and the American Mind* that, "as the exploring naturalist was the forerunner of the classifying naturalist, so was the latter the predecessor of the scientific specialist" (338-89 Smallwood).

Thoreau's reading in natural history spans this change in scientific method and focus. Thoreau's natural histories reflect, more than some of his most studied works, these historical conflicts of his age: the European roots of the natural history genre against the ardent call for an American literature; Linnaean classification against the call for a new systematic nomenclature (evident in both Europe and America, yet in America having nationalistic implications); and the natural theology present in much of the natural history writing against the rise of secular science. These conflicts shape Thoreau's increasingly complex and self-conscious attempts to effectively name, through the natural history, objects and processes of nature.

Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century European and American nature writers--such as Gilbert White, John Leonard Knapp, and Charles Waterton as well as Mark Catesby, William Bartram, and Alexander Wilson--borrowed heavily from the European notion of the pastoral in their

descriptions of nature.⁸ And while many of Thoreau's early natural histories ("A Natural History of Massachusetts" [1842], "A Walk to Wachusett" [1843], and "A Winter Walk" [1843]) do in fact imitate this style, Emerson's call for an American literature has a profound effect on Thoreau's natural histories. In "The Poet" (1844) Emerson says:

... the Poet is the Namer or Language-maker, naming things sometimes after their appearance, sometimes after their essence, and giving to every one its own name and not another's The poets made all the words, and therefore language is the archives of history (231)

In making the poet the repository of language and labeling, Emerson also obliges the poet to be aware of etymology because "language is fossil poetry" (231). The connection between this idea and his call for an American poet is that an American poetry would hinge on a historical view of language which would know the broad, various histories of things. Emerson claims:

Our log-rolling, our stumps and their politics, our

⁸ Leo Marx defines this pastoral notion by saying, "At the time that the old pastoral was dying, ... however, Europe was swept by a wave of enthusiasm for rural landscape and rural life. With this new feeling for the country came a fresh idiom, a vocabulary capable of investing the ancient ideal with new vitality" (Marx 75). However, in American nature writing after the revolution there is an increasing interest in using American "idioms" and a movement away from investing American landscape with European pastoral qualities.

fisheries, our Negroes and Indians, our boats and our repudiations, the wrath of rogues and the pusillanimity of honest men, the northern trade, the southern planting, the western clearing, Oregon and Texas, are yet unsung. (238)

This catalogue is intentionally sweeping in scope because only by taking in the untold languages\names of the typically ignored (either "Negroes and Indians" or rogues and the events in the west) may the "American" poet know the history of an American language. The catalogue in its scope functions as a way of "becoming nothing and seeing all" because as James Warren says, "the transcendentalists proposed a theory of language as an expression of the spirit, functioning to unify sense-data and concepts" (98, 12). Similarly, Thoreau's later natural histories become increasingly interested in colonial and pioneer history (reaction to/description of landscape) and Native American history and language. An excellent example of these changes is the posthumously collected *The Maine Woods* (1864). Thoreau's first visit to Maine is described in the first section "Ktaadn" (1846). In this section Thoreau spends little time discussing either pioneer or Penobscot names of the wilderness, instead using almost exclusively Greek mythology as a means of describing the landscape. In the latter two sections ("Chesuncook" [1853] and "The Allegash and East Branch" [1857]), though, Thoreau replaces

the classical references with either pioneer names and stories or Penobscot names and myths. Thoreau understood this shift:

The poet's, commonly, is not a logger's path, but a woodman's. The logger and pioneer have preceded him ... and built hearths and humanized Nature for him. But there are spirits of a yet more liberal culture, to whom no simplicity is barren. ... the poet must, from time to time, travel the logger's trail and the Indian's trail, to drink at some new and more bracing fountain ... far in the recesses of the wilderness. ("Chesuncook," 211-212)

While this may be read as a Thoreau simply pointing to a need for wilderness in the poet's experience, the claim is not merely for the poet to leave for wilderness. It is also for the poet to walk the "trails" of the logger and the Indian, to know the unwritten parts of American history, not just the "hearths" and pastoral views.

Virtually concomitant with the rising call for an American literature is a corresponding change in American science. Jefferson had already renounced Buffon's theory that New World animals are "degenerate or derivative forms of Old World animals" and noted they are distinct species (7-8 Porter). This reaction to European science is recapitulated in Alexander Wilson's *American Ornithology*, wherein Wilson lauds North American aviary species as

superior to the European varieties; *American Ornithology* also "became a compelling vehicle for learning and nationalism" (48 Porter). In addition, some American scientists were calling for a new American nomenclature, believing that Linnaean classification had failed in light of the enormous task of classifying the American landscape. For example, Constantine Rafinesque, foreseeing notions of species mutation, believed:

... the constant origin of new species through permutation permitted Rafinesque [him] to dispense with independent creations and to reaffirm the validity of American forms under distinct new names
 (Porter 82)

Rafinesque's final contribution to contemporary science is nowadays considered minimal, yet historically he represents a mood among early nineteenth century American scientists who were dissatisfied with the European "degeneration" theory of American flora and fauna and desired a new nomenclature (138 Hanley).

The vast majority of Thoreau's reading in natural history was philosophically grounded in natural theology. Smallwood goes so far as to say:

... after all the chief interests of the intellectuals of New England in the first half of the nineteenth century were theology, philosophy, and literature. Even Thoreau's interest in nature was largely

motivated by her influence upon his thoughts and feelings. (148 Smallwood)

Much of the science of the time still espoused the Linnaean concept that God had formed each creature independently and that contemporary species still had the essential characteristics of that "original mold" (197 Hanley). Thus, early nineteenth-century natural history writers felt that their purpose was to examine God's creation of the "wild species" in order to better understand God's broader scheme. For example, Audubon and Bachman in their *Quadrupeds of America* discuss the flying squirrel in a passage Thoreau had read:

... we can say for ourselves that on many occasions when studying the varied characters of the inferior creatures, we have felt that we were reading lessons taught by nature, that were calculated to make us wiser and better. Often, whilst straying in the fields and woods with a book under our arm, have we been tempted to leave Homer or Aristotle unopened, and attend to the teachings of the quadrupeds and birds that people the solitudes of the wilderness. (217-8)

The inherent comparison between nature and text in the passage is not by chance. According to conventional natural theology which followed neo-classical ideology, looking at nature is reading a book with fixed, unchanging words on a page which can be reread as it was written long

ago and intended for a human audience.⁹

Contrary to this idea of a static map of God's creation, notions of species mutation which denied that static design had been around since Lamarck (1809). The possibility of species mutation necessarily undercuts conventional natural theology because no longer is there an accurate map to be deciphered. Many of these natural histories which Thoreau had read, particularly the American works, struggle to merge these two conceptual frames--natural theology and the theory of species mutation (i.e. Aggassiz and Gould's *Principles of Zoology* [1848], Robert Chamber's *Vestiges of the Natural History of Creation* [1845], and Thaddeus Harris' *A Treatise on some of the insects of New England which are injurious to vegetation* [1852]). In Thoreau's texts these differing approaches create dialogic descriptions/names for wild nature--one intently looking at its "perfect station" in nature, the other looking at its current form and possible ancestry simultaneously. Yet there was another branch of natural theology, drawn from Goethe, which depended on the idea of *Urphaenomene*, "fundamental structural elements in nature, evident to the observer, from which the particular forms of

⁹ Sattlemeyer claims:

To the early naturalists (and to many of their descendants today) nature was the evidence of design in the universe; by studying the details and organization of nature one could discover its universal laws and even infer the attributes of its creator (xii)

all nature derive" (122 McIntosh). Thus, all of nature is changing/moving toward its inevitable perfection, but such a view also must hold that phenomenal nature is not perfect and only the imaginative act of the viewer may link it to purer form.

Some consider that the concept of species mutation derives from the theory of evolution, but the importance of Darwin is his interjection of the idea of "natural selection" which is defined as the result of "the selective pressures that nature exerts" (195 Hanley). Thoreau is on the cusp of this radical change, and his growing awareness of natural selection is evident in his natural histories. He had read Darwin's *The Voyage of the Beagle* (1845) and, according to John Hildebidle, borrows from Darwin heavily in style and philosophy (40). In addition, Thoreau was knowledgeable of both Asa Gray and Louis Agassiz, who began the American debate over natural selection in 1860 with Gray's review of Darwin's *Origin of Species*.¹⁰ The structure of his last few natural histories increasingly takes into account evolution and the subsequent change in historical time ("A Succession of Forest Trees" [1860], "Walking" [1862], "Autumnal Tints" [1862], "Wild Apples" [1862, though Thoreau died before seeing the

¹⁰ Studies of this controversy include Wayne Hanley's *Natural History in America: From Mark Catesby to Rachel Carson* (1977) for the debate in America and Lynn Barber's *The Heyday of Natural History :1820-1870* (1980) for the British debate.

galleys].

The Natural History as Literary Text

To better understand the complexity of Thoreau's natural histories it is necessary to develop a brief historiography of the criticism of the natural history. This historiography is intended to reflect the critical background for my own thinking on the natural history as a text and more specifically on Thoreau's natural histories. Literary criticism has generally neglected discussion of the natural history as literary text.¹¹ Natural history writing poses many problems for the literary scholar, the first of which is whether or not natural history is a form of literature. Literary criticism is most comfortable in responding to the fictive nature of the more studied genres of fiction, drama, and poetry (even non-fiction as long as it is an open exegesis on culture in that "interpretation" becomes a fictive space of its own). Yet the natural history in employing certain aspects of "science," appears to many to be based on a kind of positivism, which, of course, is static (atemporal and foundational) and would deny any "interpretative" response (2 Prelli).

¹¹ Within the last twenty years, though, there are more studies of scientific writing and scientific method. Some such as David Locke's *Science as Writing* concentrate on the linguistic structures of scientific method; whereas, others such as Hayden White's *Tropics of Discourse* examine the literary constructions within scientific writing, such as narrative voice within a seemingly objective text.

Yet this type of criticism ignores two important points about the natural history essay. First, pre-Darwinian natural histories were typically not written by scientific specialists; they were most often macro-visions of nature, not micro-visions of an individual species or written from a particular scientific discipline. Their intent (I refer back here to my earlier discussion of the purpose of science in natural theology) was to understand how all flora and fauna work collectively because only from this perspective can the universal scheme be seen. As Emerson says in his essay "The Uses of Natural History" (1833):

I look then to the progress of Natural Science as to that which is to develop new and great lessons of which good men shall understand the moral. Nature is a language and every new fact we learn is a new word; but it is not a language taken to pieces and dead in the dictionary, but the language put together into a most significant and universal sense. I wish to learn this language--not that I may know a new grammar but that I may read the great book which is written in that tongue. (26)

The purpose of natural history was to make manifest all of nature's workings or text. Thus, the natural history developed as a collage of various sciences and other literary genres: botany, biology, and geology, as well as

the pastoral, exploration narratives, and the autobiography. In 1812, Benjamin Waterhouse termed the natural history "a *nomen generalissimum*: a term comprehending a cluster of sciences, and a grand aggregate of knowledge" (3 Smallwood). Criticism of the natural history often ignores this shift in the role of the naturalist-writer, from decipherer\reader of nature's design to supposed objective reporter of empirical truth, particularly for the nineteenth-century natural history.¹² As this shift takes place the role of the writer changes from one who is actively "reading," thus also participating within the frame of the text, to one who appears outside the frame of the text, not participating. Such a reduction of the natural history ignores historical and ideological influences which shape its texts as much as any other writing.

Second, post-Darwinian science and natural history function within a cultural ideology just as any other human methodology and literary text. As was mentioned earlier, only recently have literary critics begun to closely examine the sciences as ideological constructions or paradigms' because in formalist criticism there are clean

¹² While Nina Baym's excellent essay "Thoreau's View of Science" does provide a strong starting point for research into Thoreau's scientific background, she ignores this very struggle of the narrative voice in the journals by focusing on how he does not accept raw fact as literary material (234).

lines between the *belles-lettres* and "non-artistic" modes of writing--those supposedly without imaginative form. Hence, scientific writings were easily distinguished from those that created an "artistic" impression. But certainly science is not external to culture. As Michel Foucault points out in *The Order of Things* (1970):

We must not see the constitution of natural history, with the empirical climate in which it develops, as an experiment forcing entry, willy-nilly, into a knowledge that was keeping watch on the truth of nature elsewhere (130)

Dismissing post-Darwinian natural history as objective factual report overlooks the "climate in which it develops," so, too, overlooking the historical\scientific forces which determine its methodology.¹³ Fritzell's

¹³ An example of this type of distinction is the question posed to Ed Lueders in his *Writing Natural History: Dialogues with Authors* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1989). He is asked the following:

How would you classify the literature of the earliest explorers and discoverers, the Europeans who came to the New World with that sense of wonder? We get a good many natural wonders in their writing, but it wasn't natural history in your sense, was it? And is there a continuity between their time and ours?

Lueders responds:

Well, I guess Captain John Smith sold pretty well. ... He was a real-estate-promotion-advertising man. ... But I'm thinking of the descriptions which went back with Smith and others from Virginia and from the Eastern coastline and from the Caribbean area. Yes, I think, after its fashion, if we put it in the time and place, there is an element of the natural history writer there, although these were not people trained in our sense scientifically, for the most part. ... There is in their work that post-Renaissance sense of the natural

criticism favors what is called "nature writing" over natural history because nature writing openly draws from its roots in pastoralism and Romanticism.

Among the first critical studies to look at the natural history as a genre is Philip Hicks' *The Development of the Natural History Essay in American Literature* (1924). Hicks defines the natural history by negation, claiming that it is not:

... inspired by an aesthetic or sentimental delight in nature in general; the narrative of travel, where observation is only incidental; and the sketch which is concerned solely with the description of scenery.

(6)

Hicks' concern is obvious, that natural history commands a distinct place in writing about nature, avoiding sentimentality, incidental comment, and surface description--emphasized by the words "merely," "only," and "solely." The natural historian in Hicks' description is

world yet to be discovered--recording the wonders of the world which could be described to the people back home. (116)

I enjoy Lueders' response both because he seems to be inclusive in defining what is or what is not "natural history" by its own historical context (again, this is not necessarily my own view) and because of his conscious or unconscious link between Smith the "real-estate-promotion-advertising man" and "that post-Renaissance sense of the natural world yet to be discovered." Lueders does not impose his contemporary scientific ideology on Smith's text to evaluate it; rather, he points clearly to "that post-Renaissance sense of the natural world yet to be discovered."

defined by how she is not in the text, the idea being that natural history writing avoids authorial intrusion--that the text is somehow more accurate for its use of an objective voice, rather than a subjective author. It would be wrong here to dismiss Hicks' claims as antiquated positivism because the belief in the possibility of objectivity persists. Marston Bates in *The Nature of Natural History* (1950) claims:

Scientists show no clear behavior peculiarities except in relation to their work. This is curious because their work involves a peculiar element, objectivity. Scientists in the laboratory and in the field behave in an inhuman way insofar as they try to examine the universe without prejudice. (260)

Bates acknowledges that objectivity is not always achieved, but his discussion of the objectivity of the scientist differentiates how scientists function in daily, social life and how they go about the work of science. Bates' suggestion, much like Hicks', is that when "real" science is being done scientists are not a part of the picture. Bates furthers his point by trying to make a clear distinction between those who are natural history writers and those who are "nature lovers":

I would distinguish between the 'amateur naturalist' and the 'nature lover.' I think the scorn that most scientists have for the nature lover comes from the

disoriented, emotional attitude of such people. For the scientist it is a perversion, sterile, and meaningless. (264)

This dichotomy between natural history writers and "nature lovers" is apparent nowadays in the fight between advocacy (ecology) and science. Though this break between advocacy and science is certainly challenged by some contemporary scientists, such as E. O. Wilson in *The Diversity of Life* (1991), many scientists consider advocacy science an appeal to a non-scholarly audience. The importance of such a debate, though, is that the appeal to "objectivity" as a criterion for defining natural history is still an issue.

John Hildebidle in *Thoreau: A Naturalist's Liberty* goes to the other extreme. Borrowing from William Smallwood and Benjamin Waterhouse, Hildebidle lists three guidelines to define the genre of the natural history:

- 1). "the principle of inclusiveness--the refusal to turn away any source of information or mode of discourse"
- 2). "the centrality of personal discourse"
- 3). "the clear attachment to place." (58)

Such a definition is inclusive, broad in its perspective, taking into account the diversity of voice and style while asserting the focal point of the author's perspective. Hildebidle, though, in elaborating on natural history's "clear attachment to place" claims that there is "a fundamental distinction between the writing of natural

history and the more modern modes of writing science which tend to be not only more specialized but more abstracted from place..." (58). Hildebidle implies that science can somehow create an acontextual space, where the idea of place does not exist. For example, I find the laboratory a desultory setting, so most of the natural histories I read are drawn from field work. But this response says more about my prejudices and background than it does about the complexity of the natural history writing. Most readers prefer natural history writing which relies heavily on field work because they most likely feel familiar with the setting; perhaps if these readers and myself were more familiar with the laboratory it would not seem so placeless.

More recent discussions of the natural history focus not on defining the genre by its format but on its linguistic structure. Peter Fritzell, in *Nature Writing and America: Essays on a Cultural Type* (1991), draws a distinction between the use of language in nature writing and natural history writing (note here a similar ideological division to Hicks and Bates) by contrasting Darwin and Thoreau:

Unlike Thoreau, Darwin consistently maintains his allegiance to conventional distinctions between figurative and non-figurative language. His puns are clearly and cleanly puns. His plays on words are

plays on words rather than stimuli to serious logical or epistemological--bio-logical, anthropo-logical, and psycho-logical--questionings. Thoreau's extended (often mixed) metaphors--his overtly paradoxical phrasings and his elaborate conceits--are more decorative elaborations of the underlying scientific methods of a natural historian. His subjects, unlike Darwin's or Gilbert White's or William Howitt's, are too often overtly philosophic or 'literary' (and even, on occasion, stylistic) for his works (including significant portions even of his later essays) to be classified as natural history.

(303)

Such a distinction, though, suggests an objective space for the role of the scientist/author different from the role of the nature writer. As Foucault claims:

... natural history--and that is why it appeared precisely at this moment [during the Classical Age]--is the space opened up in representation by an analysis which is anticipating the possibility of naming; it is the possibility of *seeing* what one will be able to say, but what one could not say subsequently, or see at a distance, if things and words, distinct from one another, did not, from the very first, communicate in representation. (130)

To argue that the natural historian is working within a

foundational language ignores the cultural milieu from which language arises (whether it be the scientific or literary community). While Darwin may maintain "his allegiance to conventional distinctions between figurative and non-figurative language," this allegiance does not make his language any less figurative. While this "allegiance" may suggest that the language is intended to be "literal" within its own ideology, the language is no more "literal" for the reader than belletristic language; "literal" language is no less ideological than belletristic language. Making a distinction such as Fritzell's is counterproductive for the critic because it neglects the reading act as an interpretation of the ideology from which the natural historian is writing--something Foucault warns against.

At another point in his criticism, though, Fritzell recants part of this notion:

Where conventional history and criticism fails, then, it fails (at least a bit ironically) because it does not conceive of science and scientific writing in the same kinds of terms it conceives of poetry and belles-lettres. (88)

His purpose in this section is to begin groundwork for a critical reception for nature writing as a genre, and the focus of his book is on the nature essay--not on the natural history. Fritzell's claim for the reception of

scientific writing as a form of *belles-lettres* is a nod to the influence of natural science on the nature essay so that he may discuss the nature essay with a diachronic method, but in doing so he ignores the ideologies from which science itself arises. The language at work in a natural history essay is a result of a historically-bound scientific ideology which does determine the narrative approach of the author but in no way diminishes the complexity of the text.

Another text which examines the natural history essay is Pamela Regis' *Describing Early America: Bartram, Jefferson, Crèvecoeur, and the Rhetoric of Natural History* (1992). Regis claims that eighteenth-century American natural histories are composites of:

... two modes, narrative and natural history description, [which] typically occupy discrete passages in these texts. Narrative suspends. Description replaces action. Natural historical representation presents America at its most characteristic--its unique plants, animals, peoples, and scenes--and as outside of time. (25)

While I do agree with Regis that there is narration at work in natural histories, unlike Regis I would argue that there is narration at work in nomenclature as well. The process of labeling various flora and fauna does not take place "outside of time" because when the scientist names the

object the words used constitute a narrative moment--when the choice of names tells a story, not creation ex nihilo. The act of labeling (whether it be under the Linnaean taxonomy or not) historicizes the natural object. While the label does in fact fix the natural object within a particular static paradigm, the name or word itself does not exist within that paradigm alone. The choices made in labeling are a product of the history and culture of the namer, particularly the species names which may come about through such unscientific sources as a familiarity with indigenous people's names, colonial or pioneer names, or even an emotive response to the surrounding landscape. For example, in his *Journal* Thoreau points out how Linnaeus could have used names of his enemies in classifying plants which grow in environs such as swamps and bogs.

What more fatal vengeance could Linnaeus have taken than to give the names of his enemies to pernicious and unsightly plants, thus simply putting upon record for as long the Linnaean system should prevail who were his friends and foes? (120-121 November 16, 1851)

A more recent example is Barry Lopez's *Of Wolves and Men*, in which he discusses the history of Latin nomenclature for various subspecies of wolves:

Monstrabilis (Texas gray wolf) means 'unusual' or 'remarkable.' *Occidentalis* (Mackensie Valley wolf)

refers, of course, to the wolf of the west, while *orion* (Greenland wolf) refers to the mythic hunter and giant. *Irremotus* (Northern Rocky Mountain wolf) means something like 'the wolf who is always showing up there.' (14)

So while taxonomy may appear to fix the natural object within a static paradigm, the representational language used creates a narration because the person who chooses the labels does so within a cultural context. While the scientist may appear to be an Adam whose original names delineate/fix the animals (certainly Linnaeus' goal), the label the scientist chooses arises from an idiosyncratic background and thus reflects personal history.

My desire in this historiography has not been to go about blithely dismissing critics of the natural history, but by examining the previous discussions to clarify my own position.¹⁴ The natural history is, of course, a text. The descriptions of the landscape in a natural history are a product of the author's experiences and ideologies

¹⁴ The formulation of my own approach to this literature depends much on these and other critics. The intent in this background has been to define some of the problems which the critic of the natural history faces and also point out that it is a growing field of study. My own approach to the natural history, which of course determines my critical response to Thoreau's writings, is not intended to supersede these critics but to further the discussion.

(including scientific methodology).¹⁵ This is not to say that actual experience in nature is a socially constructed moment. In "Discovering Nature in North America" Richard White writes:

To analyze the discovery of nature, one must try to resurrect the linguistically irreducible--the plants, the animals, the human experience within them--buried within the narratives of discovery while denying the conventional pose of texts of discovery as simply a reflection of the truths of nature as revealed by experience. (875)

White's point is well taken. I do not intend to reduce the individual, tactile experience of nature in America to identical ideological re-presentations, yet when these experiences are described (become texts), they are placed within cultural contexts; to my mind, these include the limits of language. John Dewey states:

Immediate things may be pointed to by words, but not described or defined. Description when it occurs is but a part of a circuitous method of pointing or denoting (John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*)

¹⁵ Hayden White makes this point clear in "The Fictions of Factual Representation:"

Novelists might be dealing only with imaginary events whereas historians are dealing with real ones, but the process of fusing events, whether imaginary or real, into a comprehensible totality capable of serving as the object of a representation is a poetic process. (125)

In investigating those natural histories (and their ideologies) which are significant to the creation of an American view of nature (and culture) my intent is to better understand their historical context and their subsequent influence on my own and other Americans' view of nature. Actual experience is a fundamental aspect of the writing because the focus is not just on self but on self-in-environment. The natural history as a literary text is determined by the intentionality of its historic scientific methodology and yet is bound by the relative position of the author. The author, complete with her cultural baggage of bedtime stories, analogies, allegories, and fables--and actual field experience--is confronted with the task of sorting through this information with respect to a scientific paradigm in order to accurately describe the natural phenomena. This immediate concern with accuracy is what I consider the defining motivation of Thoreau's natural histories.¹⁶

¹⁶ By "accuracy" I mean the attention paid to how language represents the natural object. In Thoreau's early natural histories his "accuracy" with naming is similar to what de Man calls in *The Rhetoric of Romance*, poetic language's "desire to draw closer and closer to the ontological status of the object, and its growth and development are determined by this inclination" (7). Thoreau in his later natural histories rejects this romantic project and focuses on the distance between labels and natural objects by increasingly considering a polyphony of labels. If there is an agenda in this dissertation (its eco-critical thesis), it hinges on a definition of "accuracy." I think that the more we, as namers of the wild, are willing to see the inaccuracy of labels, the more we become more careful namers and re-namers of the wild.

Herein lies the complexity of the natural history as a text; it is after all a text determined by what Ricoeur calls science's "constitutive noetic intention" (194 *Time and Narrative*) and yet is bound to its own temporality by the culturally determined position of the author. The manifestation of this friction in natural history is that it results in narratives created by the juxtaposing interests of the scientist/writer whose task it is to create a factual and engaging description of nature (more specifically that part or approach to nature with which the author is most concerned).¹⁷ Natural history creates for itself a context in which there exists a struggle between taxonomic accuracy and believability as well as a subjective interest of narrator or persona (here functioning as namer and observer).

Thus, whatever change that will take place as a result of this awareness is the tenuous connection that exists between ideology and action.

¹⁷ I should note here Charles Adam's superb study "William Bartram's *Travels: A Natural History of the South*." Adam's examines what he calls the "polyphonic effect" in Bartram's rhetoric:

Theological, didactic, metaphorical, affective, scientific: each of these discourses might characterize nature absolutely, but Bartram balances each against the other, so that the truth of one is dependent on the other.

Not surprisingly, then, silence consistently preoccupies Bartram. (119)
My hope is to investigate a similar rhetoric instance within Thoreau's writing, yet in Thoreau there is rarely balance and silence--more often it is struggle and friction.

Few critics of Thoreau's natural history essays look carefully at how he uses these in reference to his descriptions of the natural environment, in part because of these texts' seemingly bland scientific character--an aversion among literary scholars to deal with the interpretation of nomenclature. Also, some twentieth-century scholars and naturalists have considered Thoreau a "poor naturalist."¹⁸

Thoreau's context for the natural history is a result of his developing awareness of the various relations which are at work in the text: the stories and histories which are a part of culture's myth of the natural object (here subdivided into colonial and indigenous as well as European mythologies [the pastoral] for American landscape); the natural object as named and classified by science at that point in history (the dissatisfaction of European science in describing American landscape); the natural object as it relates to the natural phenomena in its bioregion (the growing awareness of the permutation of species based on natural selection); the audience for whom the text is intended; and all of these within the context of the mental and physical perspectives of Thoreau and his reflections on that relativism.

Only John Hildebidle pays close attention to Thoreau's

¹⁸ John Burroughs in his essay "Henry D. Thoreau" (1904) makes this charge. Also Sherman Paul's *Shores of America* (1958).

natural histories as belonging to the genre of the natural history.¹⁹ Hildebidle treats these texts as Thoreau's struggles for self-actualization in his myriad of roles. He claims, "The world's conjunction is or--be scientist or writer. Thoreau's is, repeatedly, and--he will, he insists, be a scholar and Adam, be a mystic, a Transcendentalist, and a natural philosopher to boot," yet this "synthesis" is rarely achieved and "should not undercut our appreciation of the grandness of the effort" (152). This reading of the natural history misses the import of Thoreau's evolving understanding of the complexity of the genre. Thoreau's growing awareness of the gap between the signifier and the signified, the inaccuracy and yet importance of labeling, and the resulting layering of narration in each essay comes about as he sees the limitation of each possible labeling technique. Thoreau states in his journal (August 29, 1858):

How hard one must work in order to acquire his language,--words by which to express himself! I have known a particular rush, for instance, for at least twenty years, but have ever been prevented from describing some [of] its peculiarities, because I did

¹⁹ I should note, though, Joan Burbick's *Thoreau's Alternative Histories*, Sharon Cameron's *Writing Nature: Henry Thoreau's 'Journal,'* and Sattlemeyer's introduction to his anthology *Thoreau's Natural Histories* all deal thoughtfully with these texts.

not know its name nor any one in the neighborhood who could tell me it. With the knowledge of the name comes a distincter recognition and knowledge of the thing. That shore is now more describable, and poetic even. My knowledge was cramped and confined before, and grew rusty because not used,--for it could not be used. (137)

While this passage suggests that once the object is named there will be a keener knowledge of the natural object, the passage does not claim that at that point the object is fully comprehended; Thoreau has a "distincter recognition and knowledge of the thing," not a final knowledge. In fact, according to Thoreau, it opens up more possibilities, more "poetic even." Yet this view of naming is not representative of Thoreau's early natural histories, nor is it representative of any consistency on his part toward scientific nomenclature. Thoreau struggled with these ideas of naming and thus with the natural history.

The purpose of this study is to examine Thoreau's natural histories in light of their individual historical contexts, with an emphasis on their evolving narrative methods. Thoreau's natural history writing is essentially an act of naming: a naming which increasingly takes into account more variables of his historical context as well as the historical context of the object (its relation to unique myths, nomenclatures and evolutionary background) in

order to approximate a more accurate label for the natural object. Thoreau's multi-faceted means of labeling, in its desire and yet inability to merge conflicting perspectives, creates a narrative of friction in which Thoreau seeks to create himself as both neutral nomenclator and mimetic participant. As he becomes increasingly aware of his inability to merge these discordant acts of labeling and to accurately describe the natural world, the method of narration in each of his natural histories becomes increasingly layered.

Chapter II

Thoreau's Background

in American Natural History

There is a saying in Latin that 'to name is to know:' *Nomen est numen*. The combination *fractal set* will be defined rigorously, but the combination *natural fractal* will serve loosely to designate a natural pattern that is usefully representable by a fractal set. (Benoit B. Mandelbrot, *The Fractal Geometry of Nature*)

In a sense you have got nothing new thus, for every object that we see mechanically is mechanically daguerreotyped on our eyes, but a true description growing out [of] the perception and appreciation of it is itself a new fact, never to be daguerreotyped, indicating the highest quality of the plant,--its relation to man,--of far more importance than any merely medicinal quality that it may possess, or be thought to-day to possess. (Thoreau, Oct. 13, 1860, *Journal*)

Thoreau's cultural context for the natural history has been a source of conflict in the critical reception of Thoreau's natural histories. The conflicts in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century American natural history which inform Thoreau's natural histories are the European roots of the natural history genre (the pastoral) against the ardent call for an American literature; Linnaean classification against the call for a new systematic nomenclature (evident in both Europe and America, yet in America having nationalistic implications); and the natural theology present in much of the natural history writing against the rise of secular science. It is conflicts like these that make his naming process increasingly more polyphonous.

Critical acknowledgement of Thoreau's debt to science has been mixed. Thoreau's contemporaries discuss at length

his interest in natural science. At one point Emerson half seriously suggested petitioning the town council to create a new position for Thoreau as "town naturalist"; of course, Thoreau would have nothing to do with it, but the townspeople still considered him the local expert whose keen senses, knowledge of local flora and fauna, and scientific background could either identify the obscure or do the research to find the name (292 Harding, *The Days*).

Virtually all of Thoreau's contemporaries considered his views of nature to be heavily influenced by his study of natural science. In fact, Channing and Emerson describe Thoreau in terms similar to those Thoreau in his later years often uses to decry science: his "mechanical" view, his inability to view broadly, etc. These descriptions typically fall into two categories: nomenclature and the method of observation.²⁰ Ellery Channing in *Thoreau: Poet-Naturalist* claims:

He admired plants and trees: truly, he loved them. Doubt not it was their infinite beauty which first impressed them on him; but then he held greatly that art of science which, taking up the miscellaneous crowd, impaled them in picket-fences of order, and coined a labelled scientific plan from the phenomenal

²⁰ By nomenclature, I mean that process of using scientific language to designate natural phenomena, and by the method of observation, I mean the actual physical distance and scope of his descriptions.

waste-basket of vulgar observation. (212-13)

This nomenclature or "art of science" which Channing speaks of is essential for Thoreau. As he saw himself becoming more dependent on scientific nomenclature in his descriptions, he also worried about this dependence: "The man of science, who is not seeking for expression but for a fact to be expressed merely, studies nature as a dead language" (May 10, 1853, *Journal*).

Emerson in his obituary "Thoreau" notes Thoreau's ability to observe:

His power of observation seemed to indicate additional senses. He saw as with a microscope, heard as with ear-trumpet, and his memory was a photographic register of all he saw and heard. (388)

Emerson then points out that Thoreau used this keen apprehension of nature not just for registering the fact, "but [for] the impression or effect of the fact on your mind" (388), but Emerson's use of mechanical metaphors suggests an impersonal, technical aspect to Thoreau's observation--an observation enhanced beyond that of the ordinary, subjective individual--the observation of a specialist. In addition to this question of mechanical observation, Thoreau himself struggles with the physical "distance" of his view of the object. At times he suggests the importance of unspecified, broad views:

Sometimes I would rather get a transient glimpse or

side view of a thing than stand fronting to it
 The object I caught a glimpse of as I went by haunts
 my thoughts a long time, is infinitely suggestive, and
 I do not care to front it and scrutinize it, for I
 know that the thing that really concerns me is not
 there, but in my relation to that. That is a mere
 reflecting surface. (Nov. 5, 1857, *Journal*)

Yet Thoreau (especially after his experience on Ktaadn)
 does not easily fit into the category of the
 transcendentalist (for whom nature is a mere reflecting
 surface), for he also claims at times that only those who
 narrow their vision and focus intently see best:

It is remarkable how little any but a lichenist will
 observe the bark of trees. The mass of men have but
 the vaguest and most indefinite notion of mosses, as
 a sort of shreds and fringes, and the world in which
 the lichenist dwells is much further from theirs than
 one side of this earth from the other. They see bark
 as if they saw it not. The objects which, though
 constantly visible, are rarely looked at are a sort of
 eye-brush. (Nov. 8, 1858, *Journal*)

Those who do not focus on the lichens view the world
 impressionistically because the lichens "brush" the
 landscape's clear edges and blur clear vision. The
 lichenist whose scientifically trained eye allows him to
 see bark in the landscape sees most clearly.

However, late nineteenth-century to mid-twentieth-century critical responses to Thoreau's knowledge of science reflect a different attitude than the responses of his contemporaries. Those disfavoring Thoreau's natural history writing during this time period typically fall into two groups: the first takes note of his errors in identification; the second points out the apparent randomness of his taxonomic lists, attributed by most to his unscientific thinking. Among the first critics of Thoreau's natural history writing is John Burroughs, the most popular nature essayist in America between 1885 and 1925.²¹ Burroughs claims:

Thoreau was not a born naturalist, but a born supernaturalist. He was too intent upon the bird behind the bird always to take careful note of the bird itself. He notes the birds, but not too closely. He was at times a little too careless in this respect to be a safe guide to the bird student. (134 "Another

²¹ Burroughs' own aesthetic of the nature writer is best expressed in his essays "Real and Sham Natural History" (*Atlantic Monthly*, May, 1903) and "The Literary Treatment of Nature" in *Ways of Nature* (1905). His views represent a sort of extension of literary realism in fiction. Burroughs, trained as a Darwinian naturalist, does not want the nature essayist to avoid a literary style, but does want the essayist to stay true to experience in nature and thus convey actual nature to the readers. As he claims:

No pleasure to the reader, no moral inculcated, can justify the dissemination of false notions of nature, or of anything else, and the writer who seeks to palm off his own silly inventions as real observations is bound sooner or later to come to grief. (305)

Word on Thoreau")

Burroughs, though, fails to take seriously Thoreau's concern with accuracy, but Burroughs was not alone in criticizing Thoreau's scientific mistakes. Representative of the second group, Fanny Hardy Eckstrom in a review of *The Maine Woods* adds:

Thoreau was not a woodsman; he was not infallible; he was not a scientist at all. After making allowance for ornithology in the fifties being one of the inexact sciences, the list [the Appendix to *The Maine Woods*] must be admitted to be notably bad. As a botanist he did much better; but that was largely by grace of Gray's *Manual*, then recently published. Of the scientific ardor which works without books and collates and classifies innumerable facts for the sake of systematic knowledge, he had not a particle.

(244-46 "Thoreau's 'Maine Woods'")

I am not suggesting here that these critics did not appreciate Thoreau's place in nature writing; both Burroughs and Eckstrom go to great lengths to describe the debt American nature writers owe to Thoreau.²² Thoreau did

²² Burroughs says, "Thoreau's lives and will continue to live because, in the first place, the world loves a writer who can flout it and turn his back upon it and yet make good; and again because the books which he gave to the world have many and very high literary and ethical values" (170-71 "Another Word on Thoreau") and Eckstrom claims, "Thoreau's prose stands in a class by itself. There is an honest hardness to it" (249).

make mistakes in identification, particularly in ornithology,²³ yet the importance of such criticisms is that they represent an ideological shift in reader expectation of the natural history writer's perception of landscape. When Burroughs chastises Thoreau for being "too intent upon the bird behind the bird," Burroughs' concern is not so much with accuracy, but how "fact" may be compromised by the narrative position in the text--that the description is more Thoreau than the bird. To mid-nineteenth-century, pre-Darwinian readers, distinctions between "fact" and narration were not so obvious as they were for early twentieth-century readers, who were influenced by an ideology of empiricism. Natural theology depends upon narrative involvement in landscape in order to decipher nature's/God's scheme; thus, anecdotes abound in pre-Darwinian natural histories.²⁴ While Thoreau's natural history writing should not be categorized as natural theology, certainly his earlier writing could be.

Another criticism of Thoreau's natural history writing

²³ Walter Harding addresses these in the first few pages of his *"Walden's Man of Science."*

²⁴ Emerson in "The Uses of Natural History" says, "Every fact that is disclosed to us in natural history removes one more scale from the eye; makes the face of nature around us much more significant" (15). The paradox inherent in his metaphor of seeing the fact, then having our vision made clear defines a central contradiction for the natural theologian. As a natural historian, one must be both inactive, allowing God's nature to manifest itself, and active, by deciphering the "facts" that are accumulated.

takes issue with proliferation in it of "raw" data and nomenclature without any apparent connection or sense of unity. Such criticisms fall into line with what I consider the misreading of Thoreau's interest during his last years. What I have called "narrative layering," these critics have called insignificant taxonomy.²⁵ Some point out the apparent uselessness of this information for scientists. For example, Philip Hicks claims:

The mass of facts recorded in the pages of his *Journal* has little scientific interest. Thoreau seemingly lacked the power of selection and of generalization that distinguishes the scientific mind. His observations, in the raw, are uninteresting often, and sometimes meaningless. They have the appearance of scientific observation, but are put to no scientific purpose. (71)

Others, such as Joseph Wood Krutch, claim that the "unsystematic" methodology Thoreau uses in listing his data is evidence of his lack of scientific rigor:

The completely unsystematic, almost desperately pointless character of his own quasi-scientific recordings is evidence enough that he did not really grasp what slight philosophical implications the vast

²⁵ This misreading of what Thoreau was up to has to do with the increasing polyphony of naming in his natural histories. What they see as random, pointless names I consider Thoreau's sensitivity toward the significance of names in relation with phenomenal nature.

enterprise of collecting and cataloguing did have

(181-82 Krutch)

But this kind of cataloguing was not uncommon in the nineteenth century among the burgeoning group of amateur naturalists in America and England.²⁶ These amateurs did not have in mind the future use of their collection by professional scientists; rather they kept private herbaria in order to be familiar with local flora. Thoreau, too, kept "his herbarium as an aid in sorting out the identities of plants he found in Concord and on his travels and not as a vehicle for preserving his memory among future botanists" (27 Angelo). Among the amateur collections of nineteenth-century New England, Thoreau's herbarium is one of the larger ones--containing over nine hundred specimens (27 Angelo); his collection and some of his journals have been of use to contemporary science as a record of the ecosystem of the time.²⁷

²⁶ Van Wyck Brooks in *The Flowering of New England, 1815-1865*:

Across the hinterland, through the rural centres, the new mood spread like the flowers of May. One heard the flute in the fields. Farmers and village tailors stopped to watch the birds building their nests. They went on woodland walks. They recorded the days when the wild flowers opened. (104)

Lynn Barber in *The Heyday of the Natural History* also discusses at length the fern cases of Victorian women (112-13).

²⁷ Walter Harding's "Walden's Man of Science" details the criticism of Thoreau's mistakes in ornithology and such, but the purpose of the essay is to show Thoreau's overwhelming accuracy in identification and knowledge of science. Ray Angelo in his introduction to the Botanical

These examples typify a problem in scholarly criticism of Thoreau's natural histories (and/or life). As I said in the first chapter, this scholarship often fails to recognize Thoreau as a transitional figure during a time of change in American natural science. Even the most important article on Thoreau's background in natural science, Nina Baym's "Thoreau's View of Science" argues that Thoreau favors the old naturalists (natural theology) instead of the professional naturalists:

... he turned against his early pioneers [natural scientists], dissociated himself from their efforts even as he acknowledged that what they are saying is true, and went back to his old naturalists [those who believed in natural theology] (234)

Again, this kind of criticism engages in an either/or proposition and glosses over the complexities of Thoreau's writing and life. In his *Journal*, Thoreau often expresses distrust of natural science, yet at the same time (post 1850) his journal, his reading, and his writing increasingly take into account contemporary science.²⁸ As Robert Sattlemeyer says, "our own implicit and unexamined assumption about the unbridgeable gap between science and

Index in the reprinting of Thoreau's *Journal* discusses contemporary science's use of Thoreau's descriptions.

²⁸ See Robert Sattlemeyer's *Thoreau's Reading* for a complete list of the natural histories which Thoreau had read.

imaginative truth makes it almost impossible to grasp the nature of his work from the inside" (xxvi "Introduction").²⁹ This assumption might also explain the vast difference between contemporary and twentieth-century assessments of Thoreau's interest and ability in the natural sciences. The most recent article to discuss Thoreau's scientific background and interests (1992) is Robert Richardson's "Thoreau and Science." Richardson's article traces how Thoreau changes his views of science as he reads, learns, and attempts to apply it more in his journal and his published material. Richardson concludes that:

... the late projects try, once again, to bridge the chasm between scientist and Transcendentalist, for Thoreau's *methods* pay attention to observation and detail, while his *aim* is nothing less than comprehensive: to describe the natural world, in a typical cross section called Concord. (125 Richardson)

Richardson understands the inability of contemporary criticism to pinpoint Thoreau's "project," saying, "it would be rash to assert that Thoreau ever fully reconciled

²⁹ As Thoreau says about the act of viewing:
 ... for every object that we see mechanically is mechanically daguerreotyped on our eyes, but a true description growing out [of] the perception and appreciation of it is itself a new fact, never to be daguerreotyped (Oct. 13, 1860, *Journal*)

his interests in science and Transcendentalism" (124); yet in suggesting that the later essays try "to bridge the chasm between scientist and Transcendentalist" the critic must also take into account that the "scientist" and "Transcendentalist" of the later natural histories is not the same as that of the earlier ones. As the definitions of these words/roles change for Thoreau so does the structure (narration) and teleology of the text.

American science from 1800 to 1870 experienced enormous changes in writing style, purpose, and methodology. These conflicts created a flux in natural science of the time; thus, too, public reception of these changes reflected American science's own confusion. As one report on the 1860 meeting of the American Association of Science at Newport, Maine, claims:

The general question as to Science in America--in what spirit and towards what end it works--is the foremost that could occupy the attention, not merely of the journalist, but of the philosophic historian. ... *American Science*; is there such a thing? (Aug. 25, 1860, *New York Times*)

The question is a valid one and was of concern for scientists, industry, and the public. Yet it clearly reflects the state of change in American science.

From colonial times to the early nineteenth century,

European pastoralism³⁰ dominated descriptions of landscape in England and America, both in non-scientific (discovery and exploration) and scientific literature.³¹ Some reasons for this domination are:

1. "Colonial explorers and promoters lavishly described the Atlantic seaboard ... as bountiful gardens, as virgin lands to be tamed and cultivated" in order to persuade both investors and colonists (94-95 Alexander Wilson).

2. Pastoralism held that "Nature, tamed and subdued, could be transformed into a garden to provide both material and spiritual food to enhance comfort and soothe the anxieties of men distraught by the demands of the marketplace" (8-9 Merchant).

3. Pastoralism, which views nature in a passive relationship with humanity, philosophically fits well within the Enlightenment ideology that science and technology could lead to the improvement of nature (i.e.

³⁰ That genre of literature which privileges rural life over that of urban life in that being close to the passive nature positively affects the individual spiritually.

³¹ This topic is covered by more authors than can be discussed here. The most famous criticism of pastoralism in American literature is Leo Marx's *The Machine in the Garden*. Carolyn Merchant's *The Death of Nature* and Sam Passmore's *Man's Responsibility for Nature* discuss the philosophical implications of the emergence of science and its use of pastoral ideology. Donald Worster's *The Wealth of Nature* discusses the influence of pastoral ideology in the formation of ecology.

Bacon).³²

Yet as European pastoralism in many ways affirms the role of the hero in early American literature (the virtuous outdoorsman, the regenerative powers of idyllic nature, and the possibility of redefining oneself outside civilization), it is increasingly modified by the integration of the idea of wilderness, which necessarily incorporates a journey motif (a leaving) for the hero into a non-sympathetic landscape--the hero no longer is nurtured by nature but by exploration, and often domination of wilderness assumes heroic qualities. As Peter Fritzell says:

Though, they [American nature writers] may, in one sense, have adopted a 'pastoral' mode of existence, they have consistently argued, both implicitly and explicitly, that the comforting perspectives offered by pastoral living are anything but comforting. (166)

The narrator in American natural history experiences similar changes. In the nineteenth century, scientists debated the importance of being a "field naturalist," who studies the species out-of-doors, whose tradition, though, is rooted in the pastoral (such as Isaak Walton, Gilbert White, and John Ray), or a "closet naturalist," who studies

³² I should point out here that there are many brands of pastoralism, one of which provided a radical critique of European industrialism (e.g. Blake, less radical perhaps Wordsworth).

in the museum and laboratory and whose primary interest is taxonomy.³³ By the 1860's, those imbued with the field naturalist tradition were considered quaint writers (what Baym would call "the old naturalists") but not purposeful scientists. Yet the closet naturalist suffered, too; as Darwinism became the dominant ideology, "they [the closet naturalists] could no longer feel that once a species had been named, described, and preserved in a museum, it was finished" (286-87 Barber), and field studies which paid close attention to habitat became a necessity. In Darwinism, taxonomy was no longer a static field of study, because species were constantly in a state of change in relation to the environmental forces working on them. The importance of recognizing the pastoral element of the natural history essay is that Thoreau's early natural

³³ In 1882, Frederic Harrison in his "A Few Words about the Nineteenth Century" comments:

A hundred years ago, a naturalist was a man who, having mastered, say, some millions of observations, had, if he possessed a mind of vigour, some idea of what Nature is. Now, there are millions of billions of observations, all in many different sciences, and as no human brain can deal with them, men mark off a small plot, stick up a notice to warn off intruders, and grub for observations there. And so a naturalist now often knows nothing about Nature, but devotes himself to one hundredth or thousandth part of Nature I don't say what this microscopic, infinitely vast, infinitesimally small, work has got to be done. But it has its dangers, and saps all grip and elasticity of mind, when it is done in a crude, mechanical way, by the medal-hunting crowd.

Alec Lucas' "Thoreau, Field Naturalist" tries to point out how Thoreau struggles between the roles of field naturalist and closet naturalist and claims that his later essays suffer from his becoming a closet naturalist.

histories ("A Natural History of Massachusetts" [1842], "A Walk to Wachusett" and "A Winter Walk" [1843]) were written at a time when most American science was working under the rubric of natural theology. Because of this natural theology, as Andrea Tucher points out in *Agriculture in America: 1622-1860*, there was little distinction made between utilitarian, agricultural studies and natural history because each carried an Arcadian view of nature (xi-xviii). While some scholars have examined the scientific background of Thoreau's early natural history essays, almost none has examined the influence of the agricultural studies he had read.³⁴

Another conflict within American science was the teleology of science: whether "pure" or applied science should be most pursued. Francis Bacon had claimed some two hundred and fifty years earlier that scientific materialism would offer improvement in raw materials, production, and thus, economy (Worster 212). Pastoral ideology supports this materialism by viewing nature as passive and affirming the spiritual potential of such a view (the beginnings of natural theology); therefore, American natural histories often reflected this commodification of nature. Audubon

³⁴ Only David Robinson's article "'Unchronicled Nations': Agrarian Purpose and Thoreau's Ecological Knowing" takes into account this historical background.

and Bachman's *Viviparous Quadrupeds of America*³⁵ states:

In our Illustrations we have endeavored (we hope not without success) to place before the public a series of plates, which are not only scientifically correct, but interesting to all, from the varied occupations, expressions, and attitudes ... and we have sought to describe those represented, so as not only to clear away the obscurity which gathered over some species, but to make our readers acquainted with their habits, geographical distribution, and all that we could ascertain of interest about them, and the mode of hunting or destroying such as are pursued either to gratify the appetite, to furnish a rich fur or skin, or in order to get rid of dangerous or annoying neighbors [my emphasis]. (p. viii)

Virtually all of Audubon and Bachman's descriptions have some reference to each animal's commodity value or its ability to damage crops and disturb humanized landscape. Thoreau's early natural histories also exhibit this commodification of landscape and species, such as the descriptions of muskrat pelts in "Natural History of Massachusetts" (142) and timber in "Ktaadn" (69-70). American science in the mid-nineteenth century was at a

³⁵ I will use this text as a sample text for two reasons: it clearly expresses the complexities of that time and Thoreau was familiar with it, having a copy in his library, referring to it frequently in his *Journal*.

crossroads; industry had a monetary interest in supporting applied sciences such as agricultural studies, engineering, and geology, while other fields of study, such as zoology and botany, did not garner industry support. Of the eighty papers given at the aforementioned 1860 meeting of the American Association for the Advancement of Science there were twenty reports on geology but not one on pure mathematics, botany, or zoology (Aug.25, 1860, *The New York Times*). The idea that science may sometimes produce economic benefit was not new to the mid-nineteenth century; what was new was the "spreading popular assumption that *everything* in technology was rooted in science" (128 Bruce). Natural theology dominated most popular natural histories, and the reading public perceived natural histories as useful and educational in terms of familiarity of place (being able to identify various species) and spiritual understanding (Emerson's "The Uses of Natural History"). Thus the public immediately also embraced this technology as both materially beneficial and spiritually uplifting. Much of the American public perceived those working in technology and the applied sciences as Promethean figures. Interestingly, authors such as Hawthorne, Melville, Emerson, and Thoreau in many ways rejected this rise of technology for spoiling the pastoral vision of America; in effect, they ignore the fact that the intellectual foundation for technological improvement of

nature is one aspect of pastoralism (though Thoreau's oft-quoted claim "In wildness is the preservation of the world" lends some clarity to his later understanding of this issue).³⁶ On the other hand, some transcendentalists, such as the early Emerson, welcomed technology as a way to a more perfect view of nature.

This public reception of the blending of technology and science was not limited to America. Europe also fully participated in this alliance. There was a great deal of trans-Atlantic correspondence in these fields of study because American applied sciences excelled in "the variety and specialization of their machinery" (134 Bruce). Horticulture, in particular, was never clearly "Americanized[,] for its existence depended upon a transatlantic exchange" (21 Porter). Yet in other areas of nineteenth-century science, particularly natural sciences such as botany and zoology, there were deep divisions between Europe and America. The reasons for the divisions are: Eighteenth-century European classification had made American species derivative forms of European species; the resulting American response to this perceived European domination was a call for a new systematic classification that many American natural historians saw as a nationalistic project; and European scientists perceived

³⁶ Again, I reiterate that this is but one branch of pastoralism, and that other more radical forms existed.

American science as amateurish because of the small number of professional scientists at work in America (here, the previous discussion of the differences between the closet and field naturalist is important).

The debate over classification has its roots in Linnaean methodology. Linnaeus' contribution to science was two-fold: binomial nomenclature and classificatory system.³⁷ It is important to note that in their inception these contributions constitute a kind of natural theology, since Linnaeus "believed firmly in special creation and the fixity of species" (52 Barber). God's creation was a fixed system; thus, scientific understanding and classification was a matter of deciphering the unchanging flora and fauna. The problem for post-revolutionary American science was that American species were described as degenerative forms of European species, which were typically the first species classified. The most famous example of this kind of Eurocentrism was George Louis Leclerc, comte de Buffon's *Historie naturelle, generale et particuliere*. Buffon

³⁷ William Beebe discusses Linnaeus' contribution in *The Book of Naturalists: An Anthology of the Best Natural History* (1944). Of pre-Linnaean natural history, he states:

Museums crystallized and large private collections and scientific societies were inaugurated. Yet natural-history writing in the modern sense was still impossible. Writers continued to face greater and greater difficulties in telling about plants and animals. Their trouble was that of Adam; no creature had a real name. The more different kinds of organisms became known, the longer and more intricate became descriptive labels. (9)

argued that original forms of species had existed at a time when a land bridge existed between the Old and New World; yet because of the cooler and unhealthy climate in the New World the species had degenerated (16 Porter). He claims:

In thinly inhabited regions [with a climate like America], nature is always rude and sometimes deformed. The air and the earth are overloaded with humid and noxious vapors and are unable either to purify themselves or to profit by the influence of the sun, who darts in vain his most enlivening rays upon the frigid mass. The Animals of America are tractable and timid All animals are smaller in North American than Europe.

The significance of this claim is that American landscape does not have the high (more divine) quality of the European landscape and that as the climate has caused a degeneration of the original species, so, too, would the climate have a similar effect on the human inhabitants. Cornelius de Pauw's article in the French *Encyclopedie* in 1776 made clear the applicability of Buffon's claims to both Native Americans and colonists (Porter 17). American response to Buffon was quick and vehement. Jefferson's *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1781) refutes Buffon's claims of degenerate forms by pointing out that American species were certainly as large as, if not larger than, similar European species. This kind of response set the

tone for American science for many years; American scientists often felt they were defending American national interests as much as correcting a scientific flaw. As Cheryl Porter claims:

... the relative roles of the environment versus human action in the health and "well-being" of living creatures in the New World remained a recurrent theme in American circles of science, and writers continued to defend the progress of human populations in the United States. (20)

This nationalism necessarily incorporated a critique of European nomenclature; because Linnaean nomenclature depended on a fixed system and because initial species named were usually European, American species generally were incorrectly grouped under a European genus because only when all the species of a genus are known can they be accurately named. In 1822, DeWitt Clinton lamented that American birds were "lost under European names" (39 Hibernicus). In an example of mammal names, Audubon and Bachman in *Quadrupeds* discuss a rat which went by three common names, Cotton-Rat, Hairy Campagnol, and Wood-Rat:

Forester, and Harlan, refer this species to *Mus sylvaticus* of Europe. Forester's specimens came from Hudson's Bay at an early period, when it was customary to consider American species of *Quadrupeds* and *Birds* as mere varieties of those of Europe. Harlan, instead

of describing from an American specimen, literally translated Desmarest's description of the European *Mus sylvaticus* and applied to our species, (see Mam. p.301,) in doing which, by neglecting to institute a comparison, he committed a great error. (306)

Other responses, particularly those earlier in the nineteenth century, were far more acerbic in their response. For example, Alexander Wilson's *American Ornithology* (1808-1814) claims that:

This eternal reference of every animal of the new world to that of the old, if adopted to the extent of this writer Buffon, with all the transmutations it is supposed to have produced, would leave us in doubt whether even the *Ka-te-dids* of America were not originally Nightingales of the old world degenerated by the inferiority of the food and climate of this upstart continent. (104-5)

Others went further in their criticism by calling for a new systematic classification. Linnaeus' last edition of *Systema naturae* had described 8,500 plants and 4,236 animals, and ... only 193 of these were American; and while American naturalists used taxonomy to designate what was American with increasingly nationalistic names, the proliferation of names became a difficulty because of the necessity of addenda, such as Say's *Glossary to Say's Entomology* (1825). The artificial Linnaean system came to

represent to some American naturalists a European imposition on the American landscape both because of its inability to categorize American species accurately and because it made reading and public participation in natural history increasingly more difficult (77 Porter). This public participation in natural history is significant because of natural theology and its importance in public education; after all, many of these natural histories were written during the Jackson era, when specialization in the sciences was perceived by lay persons as elitist. Thoreau notes in his *Journal* between the years of 1850 and 1853 his own thinking on this controversy (18 Angelo).³⁸ This

³⁸ Channing's discussion of Thoreau's reading and study of the natural sciences is important:

His study of old writers on Natural History was careful: Aristotle, Aelian, and Theophrastus he sincerely entertained, and found from the latter that neither the weather nor its signs had altered since his day. In continuing this line of study, he was aided by the perusal of St. Pierre, Gerard, Linnaeus, and earlier writers. The 'Studies of Nature' he admired, as written with enthusiasm and spirit,--qualities in his view essential to all good writing. The old English botanist pleased him by his affectionate interest in plants, with something quaint, like Evelyn, Tusser, and Walton. Recent scientific *pate-de foie-gras*--a surfeit of microscope and 'dead words with a tail'--he valued for what it was worth--the stuffing. For the Swede, his respect was transcendent. There is no better explanation of his love for botany than the old--'Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.' His pleasant company, during so many days of the year, he wished he was better acquainted with. The names and classes change, the study of the lovely flower persists. He wished to know willow and grass and sedge, and there came always with the new year the old

conflict is significant for Thoreau's natural histories because only after he begins to use the natural system does he begin including scientific nomenclature in these texts.

Of the American naturalists involved in this controversy, Constantine Rafinesque was one of the most nationalistic and outlandish of the time. Colleagues considered him both brilliant and "eccentric" (Audubon, in *Ornithological Biographies*). His penchant for naming new species was almost maniacal and, while he was often correct, he made many mistakes, too; the more professional scientific community forced Rafinesque to privately print his pamphlets and his later reputation was tarnished by these errors (260 Bruce). What is important, though, is that Rafinesque's systematic classification links the notion of species mutation to an explanation of the differing species in America. In *New Flora and Botany of North America* (1836), he says:

All species might have been varieties once, and many varieties are gradually becoming species by assuming constant and peculiar characters (6)

Although Rafinesque was very popular among lay readers, American science did not accept Rafinesque's new system because it still allowed for Buffon's degeneration of species. However, Rafinesque's system did stress the

wish renewed: a carex, a salix, kept the family secret.
(61-2)

importance of new names for American species, because the species were distinct from European species. As Cheryl Porter claims:

Since the constant origin of new species through permutation permitted Rafinesque to dispense with independent creations and to reaffirm the validity of American forms under distinct new names, he believed he had fulfilled the goal of a generation of naturalists working in this country. (812)

In addition, Rafinesque's systematic classification reinforced the importance of the field naturalist because species were constantly in flux (negating the importance of the closet naturalist); the field naturalist who was aware of similar species in the area was best prepared to classify. In America, with its vast frontier and seemingly endless supply of new species, the field naturalist (as distinct from British field naturalists) had flourished. Significantly, Rafinesque's ideas foreshadow Darwin's natural selection, and since a clear understanding of natural selection depends heavily on a familiarity with habitat, the American field naturalist tradition opened the way for Darwinism in this country.

The most important debate in nineteenth-century science was between neo-classical natural theology and natural selection. Natural theology, as I have previously discussed, allowed the public (particularly the middle

class) to participate in what was considered not only a highly respected field in which the public could improve themselves intellectually, but also a spiritually uplifting pastime. As Audubon and Bachman put it:

It has sometimes been questioned whether the investigation of objects of natural history was calculated to improve the moral nature of man, and whether by an examination into the peculiar habits of the inferior animals he would derive information adapted to the wants of an immortal being, leading him from the contemplation of nature up to nature's God.

(217-8)

Their answer to this question is unequivocally yes. To the lay readership this meant that knowing the names of local flora and fauna was not only a popular pastime (like the popularity of drawing room collections) but was also a means to better understand God's order. As Lynn Barber points out, "every Victorian young lady could reel off the names of twenty different kinds of ferns or fungus" (13). This preoccupation with nomenclature was just as popular in America, particularly in the Northeast, and Thoreau was not averse to it. As Ellery Channing says of Thoreau:

A hearty crack in Latin he rejoiced at; not merely because he had digested it early, but as a stencil-tool for the mind. He prized a substantial name for a thing beyond most sublunary joys. Name it! Name

it! he might have cried to the blessed fortune. (212-13 Channing)

Thoreau's journals reflect his preoccupation with scientific nomenclature even when participating in science was becoming more difficult for the general public. As the sciences became more specialized and more exacting in methodology, the lay reader found it more difficult to participate in natural history. As was mentioned earlier, more supplements and glossaries were necessary, and the introduction of species mutation began to erode the base of natural history's widespread popularity.

Ultimately, Darwinism destroyed the two ideologies which for so long had kept natural theology popular: "... that no creature had ever changed its form since it was originally created and that none had ever been added or lost" (303 Kastner). In 1860, Thoreau read *Origin of Species* and began to incorporate Darwin's ideas into his natural histories. The effect of his use of Darwinism in his natural histories is that it undercuts the definitiveness (read neo-classical natural theology) with which the narrator names/describes the natural object.

As Darwinism began to receive broader acceptance and replace natural theology, public reception of the natural history began to wane; *Origin of Species* (1858) was far more detailed than previous natural histories in its

collection of facts and in methodology.³⁹ While this specialization was appealing for the professional scientist, the amateur naturalist "could no longer gloss over areas of ignorance with pious references to the Creator and His mysterious ways, or account for gaps in knowledge by postulating miracles and supernatural events" (289 Barber). These changes had an important effect on public perception of the natural history; amateur and "gentleman" naturalists felt less a part of the science being done because "knowing the Linnaean names of things began to seem hopelessly fuddy-duddy . . .," and the natural history no longer served a clearly educational role as natural theology would have it (294 Barber). Gentility and propriety were no longer respected aspects of the natural history narrator.

In late nineteenth-century America, Darwinism was also partly responsible for the rise of the nature essay. As Roderick Nash puts it:

... there was a growing tendency to associate wilderness with America's frontier and pioneer past that was believed responsible for many unique and desirable national characteristics. Wilderness also acquired importance as a source of virility,

³⁹ Interestingly, though, *Origin of Species* does forward a kind of natural theology, but the complexity of the theory did not allow a general public to fully apprehend its claims.

toughness, and savagery--qualities that defined fitness in Darwinian terms. (145).

Thus, as Darwinism ended the popularity of natural history, it also made way for the popularity of writings by Burroughs, Muir, and Austin, a popularity based on an ideological link Americans made between their pioneer past, Darwinian "fitness," and those characters who have journeyed in the wilderness. This link might also account for the rise of popular acceptance of Thoreau toward the end of the century; most mid-nineteenth-century readers valued natural theology, so they were accustomed to the narrative role of an unwavering voice describing God's scheme. Late nineteenth-century readers, while pointing out his failings as a naturalist, were far more willing to listen to a narrative voice, such as that in Thoreau's later essays, which struggles in describing the landscape.⁴⁰

Earlier in this chapter Joseph Wood Krutch was quoted as saying of Thoreau's background in science "... that he

⁴⁰ Lynn Barber claims:

Instead of the image of the skilled, benevolent watchmaker unerringly constructing his perfect watch, one now had the image of a blind, ignorant and ill-tempered mechanic haphazardly throwing cogs and springs together until one day, by pure fluke, he happened to produce a working watch. Or perhaps there was no mechanic at all; perhaps it was *all* chance. (290)

This will be discussed in greater detail later in this work, but the advent of "chance" plays a significant role in Thoreau's struggle with narrative choice.

did not really grasp what slight philosophical implications the vast enterprise of collecting and cataloguing did have ... (181-82). He follows this statement saying:

He was living toward the end of the heyday of the anatomist and taxonomist, when natural history did not mean primarily the study of habits and life histories ... or, still less, those attempts to understand man as a part of nature" (Krutch 182)

Thoreau was definitely "living at the end of the heyday of the anatomist and taxonomist," and for this reason many of his natural histories reflect natural theology in methodology and teleology. For example, "A Natural History of Massachusetts" and "A Walk to Wachusett" gloss over the details of the landscape and avoid any sort of detailed use of scientific language. In fact, Thoreau does not frequently use scientific names until the late fifties. But Krutch is incorrect in lumping all of Thoreau's natural histories into this criticism.⁴¹ Those writings cover approximately twenty years, and they change in complexity of style and purpose, reflecting the vast changes American

⁴¹ Sattlemeyer claims:

The challenge Thoreau set for himself at the beginning of his career, one he would respect if not always be comfortable with for the rest of his life, was how to contribute legitimately to the natural history of New England without succumbing to the lure of method and material results. (xvi)

I agree with this argument providing that we see Thoreau not as a stagnant figure in his understanding or application of science.

science went through during this time.

Chapter III

The Early Natural Histories

"If life were long enough, among my thousand and one works should be a book of nature whereof Howitt's *Seasons* should be not so much the model as the parody. It should contain the natural history of the woods around my shifting camp for every month in the year. It should tie their astronomy, botany, physiology, meteorology, picturesque, and poetry together. No bird, no bug, no bud, should be forgotten on his day and hour...." (Emerson, 1835, *Journals*)

"I would keep some book of natural history always by me as a sort of elixir, the reading of which should restore the tone of the system." (Thoreau, "Natural History of Massachusetts")

"Poetic language seems to originate in the desire to draw closer and closer to the ontological status of the object, and its growth and development are determined by this inclination." (de Man, *The Rhetoric of Romance*)

Thoreau's first three natural histories appear within the space of a year and two months (July, 1842 to October, 1843). He was five years out of Harvard and had worked both in the family business and as a teacher. During these five years, he had met and become friends with a group of like-minded thinkers, who informally met most often at Emerson's house and referred to themselves as the "Hedge Club" (Harding, *The Days* 63). Members included George Ripley, Orestes Bronson, Jones Very, Margaret Fuller, Elizabeth Peabody, Bronson Alcott, and Theodore Parker (Harding, *The Days* 63). At the meeting on September 18, 1839, the group decided to start *The Dial* as a quarterly beginning on July 1, 1840, with Margaret Fuller as editor (Harding, *The Days* 113). Thoreau published in *The Dial* sparingly during Fuller's editorship, and not until Emerson took over in March, 1842, did a longer work of Thoreau

appear.⁴²

Thoreau's reading at this time was informed by natural history. He had begun to study natural history with Thaddeus William Harris while at Harvard. Harris, a librarian at Harvard and an entomologist, taught the one science course--titled Natural History--that Thoreau had been able to take at Harvard (Harding, *The Days* 35).

Among the natural histories Thoreau had read was William Howitt's *Book of Seasons* (1836). Howitt claims the "plan" of his book:

...has been to furnish an original article on the general appearances of Nature in each month, drawn entirely from my own regular observation through many seasons; and finally, to superadd a great variety of facts from the best sources, as well as such as occurred to myself after the principle article was written. (vi)

The significance of this text for Thoreau is that it suggests to him an organizational structure for much of his nature writing: the seasons.⁴³ For Thoreau, using a "natural" pattern allows nature to organize the phenomenon

⁴² See pp. 32-29 in Walter Harding's *The New Thoreau Handbook* for a listing of Thoreau's essays in *The Dial*.

⁴³ Hildebidle makes this point clear: The organizational principle which Howitt employs, that of the agricultural calendar (we might today call it an almanac), allows him to go beyond the most apparent meanings of 'prosperity.' (67)

itself; thus the narrator does not impose a false, "civilized" organization, or for that matter a commodified organization. In addition, such a natural history morally improves its readers by its ethical dimension--the natural historian assumes a broader and more objective role that transcends the subjective and personal. For example, in 1836, Thoreau writes of Howitt's book:

There are certain pure and substantial pleasures, pleasures springing from a never failing source, which are absolutely denied those who are destitute of pure and elevated principle, whose sordid views extend no further than the profitable (*Early Essays* 27)

The idea is that avoiding an anthropocentrically generated organization changes the very scope of "view" of the observer. Thoreau uses the term "view" to refer to the act of organizing nature (it plays the central narrative role in natural history). He links the natural with the pleasurable and the principled by the ability to see broadly, and he links the "sordid" with the self-interested by one's narrow scope. His early emphasis on this narrative role is important because it defines a theme which becomes more prominent in his later natural histories--the intimate connection between organizing/viewing nature and culturally determined ideologies of nature. Early Thoreau sees nature as potential allegory for culture, whereas later Thoreau sees

the differing ideologies through which nature is filtered.

Early in his career, Thoreau was more optimistic about the possibility of "natural" or "universal" forms of organization, and his earlier works often reflect those forms: the review of Howitt's book itself spans the calendar year discussing each month; "Natural History of Massachusetts" is structured according to seasons; and "A Winter Walk" occurs during a day. The importance of such organization is that it supposedly allows the narrator to place raw data in his text without succumbing to ideology.⁴⁴ Howitt continues:

To these a complete table of the Migrations of Birds; a copious list of Garden Plants which come into flower in the month; a Botanical Calendar, and an Entomological catalogue; a notice of Rural occupations, and, finally, one of Angling, are added.

(27)

Remember that Howitt notes that he "superadd[s] a great variety of facts from the best sources" only after he has allowed the organization to be established; otherwise he is no better than those who commodify nature. Thoreau emphasizes this point, noting:

Her devotee is never alone; the solitary vale is as the crowded city, even there may he 'hold sweet

⁴⁴ Though, as I stated in Chapter 2, I believe there is inherent contradiction in natural theology with reference to the commodification of nature.

converse' with nature; even, did I say? here is she most garrulous, most communicative; this her home--her country-seat, where she resides all the year round. This love is universal, it is emphatically natural. (Early Essays 27)

The "solitary vale" in which nature converses with her "devotee" and the comfort that she gives her devotee is both "universal" and "natural"; such a view shows how natural theology affects the role of the narrator in natural history. The discrete data must be organized according to a universal pattern: the narrator is more an observer than an organizer.

On April 10, Emerson had Thoreau begin reviewing a set of natural histories issued by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts (Harding, *The Days* 116). These texts include: Chester Dewey and Ebenezer Emmons' *Reports on the herbaceous Plants and on the quadrupeds of Massachusetts* (1840); Augustus A. Gould's *Report on the Invertebrata of Massachusetts* (1841); Thaddeus William Harris' *A report on the insects of Massachusetts, injurious to vegetation* (1841); Edward Hitchcock's *Report on the geology, mineralogy, botany, and zoology of Massachusetts* (1835); D. H. Storer and W. B. O. Peabody's *Reports on the fishes, reptiles and birds of Massachusetts* (1839). The resulting text is Thoreau's "Natural History of Massachusetts" published in *The Dial*, July, 1842. It would be wrong to

suggest that "NHM" is clearly a natural history (as I have defined the genre), for, after all, the text is a review.⁴⁵ Thoreau's impetus for the essay is not the natural world but the texts Emerson asked him to review. Keeping this impetus in mind is important for the reader because the descriptions of natural phenomena in "NHM" do not reflect the same mimetic qualities as Thoreau's later natural histories. The work therefore lacks the clarity of description that later works reflect because these descriptions are mostly intended to counter those in the Reports. Yet it would be a greater mistake to suggest that "NHM" is just a review, for Thoreau deals sparingly with the Reports, instead focusing on how and why one should

⁴⁵ Critics too often read the text as just a natural history. Kevin Van Anglen's "True Pulpit Power: 'Natural History of Massachusetts' and the Problem of Cultural Authority" makes note of this misreading:

... when "Natural History" is viewed as a review-essay committed to advancing the position of Henry Thoreau (and men-of-letters generally) in the literary market-place, an overarching pattern does, in fact, emerge, one which rhetorically advances these other, more self interested aims: that of the Puritan sermon. (121)

He reacts to Robert Richardson's claims that the essay lacks form:

The form of the essay is not adequate to its larger claims. It proceeds, seriatim, through insects, then birds, then animals. Anecdotal and personal experience is important, making the essay concrete and familiar, and there is at least some effort to organize each section seasonally. (119)

For my purposes arguing form or formlessness does not really serve a purpose. I do see the text as using some aspects of the narrative role of the Puritan minister but focusing on this to the exclusion of other narrative roles seems to ignore a large portion of the essay.

read books of natural history.

As mentioned earlier, "NHM"'s seasonal structure is used as a means of discussing the flora and fauna of Massachusetts. "NHM" begins:

Books of natural history make the most cheerful winter reading. I read Audubon with a thrill of delight, when the snow covers the ground, of the magnolia, and the Florida keys ... I am singularly refreshed in winter when I hear of service-berries, poke-weed, juniper. (127-28)

The importance of winter is that it suggests the broader scope of the author (not just summer but its opposite). This ability to take into account opposites suggests an objectivity and breadth to the narrator's descriptions. Elsewhere in the text, though, the seasons are used to frame natural phenomena:

In the autumn days, the creaking of crickets is heard at noon over all the land, and as in summer they are heard chiefly at nightfall, so then by their incessant chirp they usher in the evening of the year. (133)

and

At length the summer's eternity is ushered in by the cackle of the flicker among the oaks on the hillside, and a new dynasty begins with calm security. (137)

By using the seasons to frame his essay and the natural phenomena it describes, Thoreau attempts to avoid imposing

false descriptions on nature. Finding a "true" means of viewing nature becomes a predominant theme in the essay, particularly in the concluding paragraph.

The narrative voice that dominates "NHM" has two interests--that of the minister and that of the reader of natural histories. The ministerial interest in the text functions to open up the style with which Thoreau reviews these natural histories (as I have pointed out, Thoreau rarely deals with the texts in his review) and to link the raw data of the "scientist" to spiritual ends. The other interest, that of the reader of natural histories, continually informs us of the values of natural history. These two interests in "NHM" are not a forced pairing; in fact, they represent a common *topos* in early and middle nineteenth-century natural history writing. After all, many of these natural histories were written by ministers, and only when specialization and notions of evolution began to gain acceptance did readers begin to see as antiquated the ministerial narrative voice in natural history.⁴⁶

Near the end of "NHM" Thoreau states, "The works we have placed at the head of our chapter, with as much

⁴⁶ Van Anglen ignores the long tradition of ministerial-natural historian writers and natural theology ideology. What Van Anglen calls Thoreau's "attempt to combine" the scientist and minister is less a struggle for Thoreau than Van Anglen claims. The greater struggle for Thoreau comes from his later disillusion with natural theology. See Chapter 2 "Thoreau's Background in American Natural History" for a longer discussion of this issue.

license as the preacher selects his text, are such as imply more labor than enthusiasm" (160). Thoreau reiterates his purpose to his audience at the end of the text (both a review and an assessment of the value of natural history writing). The ministerial interest Thoreau adopts in "NHM" not only allows him to open up his method of reviewing these natural histories, but it also suggests to the reader that she juxtapose Thoreau's own descriptions of Massachusetts flora and fauna, which are written more from "enthusiasm," with the descriptions in the Reports, which are written from "labor." Thoreau emphasizes this juxtaposition by placing his own descriptions before the passage quoted above and placing a brief and straightforward assessment of the Reports immediately after the passage:

The reports on Fishes, Reptiles, Insects, and Invertebrate Animals, however, indicate labor and research, and have a value independent of the object of the legislature.

Those on Herbaceous Plants and Birds cannot be of much value, as long as Bigelow and Nuttall are accessible.

....

The Quadrupeds deserved a more final and instructive report than they have obtained. (160)

Thoreau intends for his bland review to imply more "labor" on his part than "enthusiasm," thereby strengthening the value of his own descriptions (and the intent from which his descriptions arise). Any weakness in the Reports is not so much with the "measurements and minute descriptions," but that they do not link their descriptions to spiritual ends. Thoreau has in mind a methodology or natural observation which links the scientific and ministerial in a much more immediate way.

The ministerial interest in "NHM" also links the training of the "scientist" to spiritual ends. Early in the essay, Thoreau claims:

We fancy that this din of religion, literature, and philosophy, which is heard in pulpits, lyceums, and parlors, vibrates through the universe, and is as catholic a sound as the creaking of the earth's axle; but if a man sleep soundly, he will forget it all between sunset and dawn. (131)

On the surface, this passage appears to contradict the ministerial interest that Thoreau adopts by suggesting that sermons heard in church are quickly forgotten, but Thoreau's intent is to point out the weaknesses in essentially human constructions of "the creaking of the earth's axle," not just in the church. These constructions are inadequate because they all focus on the impermanent; Thoreau's interest is with the universal. Thoreau later

continues:

When I detect a beauty in any of the recesses of nature, I am reminded, by the serene and retired spirit in which it requires to be contemplated, of the inexpressible privacy of a life,--how silent and unambitious it is. (131)

Note the contrast Thoreau makes between the "din" of human affairs and the "silent and unambitious" "privacy of a life." She who can "detect a beauty" must prepare herself in spirit. The spirit that Thoreau here believes is crucial to observation of nature is "serene and retired"--one could also read "scientific." Thoreau then makes the connection between recognizing "a beauty" in nature and observing as a scientist, saying:

The beauty there is in the mosses must be considered from the holiest, quietest nook. What an admirable training is science for the more active warfare of life. Indeed, the unchallenged bravery, which these studies imply, is more impressive than the trumpeted valor of the warrior. (131)

Thoreau is again playing with the reader's expectations by aligning "warfare," "bravery," and "the trumpeted valor of the warrior" with the "admirable training of science" which must be "considered from the holiest, quietest nook." Certainly Thoreau intends for "warfare" to be a shocking metaphor for science, but keep in mind that he has already

contrasted human constructions of universal truth which are spoken aloud with the recognition of "beauty" in nature as a quiet observer. Thus, Thoreau again turns on what he sees as the shallowness of societal/vocal estimation of universal truth in order to more strongly emphasize the quiet "bravery" of the scientist. Note that this reflects the earlier discussion of scope of view: the loss of self interest also suggests the loss of a narrow view, and the assumption of a broader view suggests a more "natural" view. He follows this description by lauding Thales for doing his astronomy in the solitude of night, and he compares Linnaeus' "surveying" his naturalist's clothes before a trip to Lapland to Bonaparte's "complacency" in surveying "a park of artillery for the Russian campaign" (132). The "bravery" that Thoreau assigns to the scientist, then, has to do with how he avoids participating in the artificial and/or socially popular and how he sees nature with a more "accurate" view. Thoreau says:

His eye is to take in fish, flower, and bird, quadruped and biped. Science is always brave; for to know is to know good; doubt and danger quail before her eye. What the coward overlooks in his hurry, she calmly scrutinizes, breaking ground like a pioneer for the array of arts that follow in her train. (132)

The bravery Thoreau is concerned with has to do with the ability of the scientist to closely and patiently observe

nature. Yet his list in the first sentence is intended to point out that while scientific observation may be specific to each branch of science it must also be collective because when the scientist has an "accurate" view of nature in one field the scheme of the rest of nature becomes understood. Here Thoreau suggests his ties to earlier natural history writers whose texts were not limited to one specialized field. For example, Thoreau uses entomology as a sample field of scientific study to discuss this notion of collectivity:

Entomology extends the limits of being in a new direction, so that I walk in nature with a greater space and freedom. It suggests besides, that the universe is not roughhewn, but perfect in its details. Nature will bear the closest inspection; she invites us to lay our eye level with the smallest leaf, and take an insect view of its plain. She has no interstices; every part is full of life. I explore, too, with pleasure, the sources of the myriad sounds which seem the very grain and stuff of which eternity is made. (132-3)

For Thoreau, the entomologist observes nature on the "insect view of its plain," and this view broadens the ability of the observer to better see that nature has "no interstices." By being able to adopt a differing view than that of society, the entomologist might see the perfect

pattern of nature denied to most people. The significance of Thoreau's claim is that he believes that if one can assume an accurate view of one aspect of nature the paradigm of all of nature is made clear.

In many ways this is Thoreau's overriding concern; if he can establish the belief that the scientific view of nature gives the reader a universal understanding of God's design, then the value of reading natural history, of the Reports' descriptions, and of Thoreau's own descriptions, is linked to higher cause.⁴⁷ Thoreau's intent is in keeping with other natural histories at this time: to observe nature in such a way as to find patterns which are repeated and to see eternal laws behind the phenomena.⁴⁸ For example, Thoreau quotes in his journal on Feb. 20, 1842 (approximately two months before receiving the Reports from Emerson):

'Examine animal forms geometrically, from man, who represents the perpendicular, to the reptile which forms the horizontal line, and then applying to those forms the rules of the exact sciences, which God Himself cannot change, we shall see that visible nature contains them all; that the combinations of the seven primitive forms are entirely exhausted, and

⁴⁷ Richardson makes a similar point about Thoreau's purpose in "NHM" (*Henry Thoreau* 119).

⁴⁸ See Chapter 2.

that, therefore, they can represent all possible varieties of morality.'--From 'The True Messiah; or the Old and New Testaments, examined according to the Principles of the Language of Nature. By G. Segger,' translated from French by Grater. (*Journal*)

Once these forms are recognized, the scientist will see them repeated because they are universal and "God himself cannot change" them. Recognizing these forms also gives the observer a universal understanding of the moral landscape. Thoreau's search for universal patterns anticipates passages such as *Walden's* melting sandbank, and in "NHM" he also observes patterns, such as the foliate structure (157). From Thoreau's emphasis on structure, though, comes his belief that scientific observation has the ability to transcend the human perspective and make these connections. Also note that Thoreau does not limit the "foliate structure" to a particular genera or even phylum. He looks at all natural phenomena for the repetition of the pattern. Thoreau builds on this theme of connecting scientific observation and understanding eternal patterns (read scope of view) in order to contextualize his own descriptions of natural phenomena and review those of the Reports. Near the end of essay, Thoreau says of the Reports:

These volumes deal much in measurements and minute descriptions, not interesting to the general reader,

with only here and there a colored sentence to allure him, like those plants growing in dark forests, which bear only leaves without blossoms. But the ground was comparatively unbroken, and we will not complain of the pioneer, if he raises no flowers with his first crop. Let us not underrate the value of a fact; it will one day flower in a truth. (160)

Thoreau acknowledges that the blandness or "objectivity" of the Reports will not appeal to the general reader, but he does not make apologies for them. The simile Thoreau uses --that the few "colored sentence[s]" which the general reader might enjoy are like "plants growing in dark forests, which bear only leaves without blossoms"-- is reminiscent of the "recesses of nature" in which Thoreau claimed earlier he most often finds beauty. Thoreau admiringly compares these natural historians to "pioneers" who clear the underbrush and plant their crop.⁴⁹ Thoreau does not so much laud the Reports themselves as he lauds the methodology (scientific observation) which the authors used; for the value of **these** texts is not as important to Thoreau as the potential their methodology suggests. Much of the above discussion has already elaborated on the other perspective in "NHM," that of the reader of natural

⁴⁹ This ambivalent metaphor for landscape as both natural and commodity belies a common struggle in natural theology (see Chapter 2) and Thoreau's own struggle until his visit to Maine.

histories, but noting this interest is important. While the ministerial perspective frees up Thoreau's style for reviewing the Reports and links the use of scientific data to spiritual ends, the other interest continually assesses the value of reading natural history. The first line of "NHM" states, "Books of natural history make the most cheerful winter reading." As I said earlier, winter is important for the narrator but mostly because in his confinement the "cheer" the reader receives is more a sort of restorative ability in reading natural history that makes apparent a sense of universal pattern.⁵⁰ The "elixir" of reading natural histories heals by "restoring tone"; this "tone" suggests that there is a balance or harmony in the human condition which society--the source of this illness--obfuscates. The more natural history restores to a state in which we observe the recurring laws inherent in natural phenomena, the "healthier" we are. The less we focus our view on human history of landscape, the more we are likely to see the ahistorical, timeless qualities of nature.⁵¹ Thoreau supports this point by examining landscape in terms of political importance:

The merely political aspect of the land is never very

⁵⁰ See also Frederick Garber in *Thoreau's Fable of Inscribing* claims of this concern in "NHM" (50).

⁵¹ This idea is consistent with earlier Thoreau and his adherence to natural theology, but is not at all consistent with later Thoreau.

cheering; men are degraded when considered as the members of a political organization. On this side all lands present only the symptoms of decay. I see Bunker Hill and Sing-Sing, the District of Columbia and Sullivan's Island, with a few avenues connecting them. But paltry are they all beside one blast of the east or the south wind which blows over them. (129)

Thoreau is not calling for political anarchy. Rather he intends to shock his readers into seeing that any view of the landscape in political terms (borders, battlegrounds, capitals, prisons, etc.) is a short-term, transient, and enervating perspective.⁵² What Thoreau seeks is a view of landscape which escapes the boundaries of individual history--a view that asserts a continuity to the multitude of data we perceive daily and that humans have perceived

⁵² In the journal entry from which this was taken, Thoreau tempered what certainly would have read as a more anarchistic claim:

The merely political aspect of the land is never very cheering. Men are degraded when considered as the members of a political organization. **As a nation the people never utter one great healthy word. From this side all nations present only the symptoms of disease.** [my emphasis] I see Bunker Hill and Sing-Sing, the District of Columbia and Sullivan's Island, with a few avenues connecting them. But paltry are they all beside one blast of the east or the south wind which blows over them. (Dec. 31, 1841, *Journal*)

If nations "never utter one great healthy word," the democratic process itself is in question, for democracy depends on discussion and compromise as its medium.

for aeons.⁵³ According to Thoreau, natural history does not focus on mere political views of landscape but on the repetitions and consistencies within the natural world.

Thoreau's descriptions in "NHM" reflect the natural theology for which he argues throughout the essay. Of the osprey, Thoreau says:

There is the tyranny of Jove in its claws, and his wrath in the erectile feathers of the head and neck. It reminds me of the Argonautic expedition, and would inspire the dullest to take flight over Parnassus.
(137)

and of the fox, he says:

Perhaps of all our untamed quadrupeds, the fox has obtained the widest and most familiar reputation, from the time of Pilpay and Aesop to the present day.
(144)

and of spear-fishing, he says:

The dullest soul cannot go upon such an expedition without some of the spirit of adventure; as if he had stolen the boat of Charon and gone down the Styx on a midnight expedition into the realms of Pluto. (150)

He borrows much from classical mythology and fables in order to connect his descriptions to a long history of the

⁵³ Garber makes a similar point (51). But, importantly, what happens in Thoreau's own descriptions is that they borrow from Greek and Roman history to authenticate their continuity throughout human history.

animals or actions. But in doing so, Thoreau does little in the way of designating the difference between the actual landscapes: the landscape of classical texts and that of Massachusetts. While Thoreau does use some descriptions from Nuttall and Goldsmith (the osprey, the bittern, and the veery) and a few local stories, these are typically brief and not well integrated into his larger purpose. Thoreau's descriptions are intended to connect his audience to a larger, more permanent history, and the more Thoreau can indicate a continuity of observation, the more his descriptions suggest a paradigm.

Thoreau concludes "NHM" with a seemingly contradictory statement, given his preoccupation with the bravery of a "scientific view":

The true man of science will know nature better by his finer organization; he will smell, taste, see, hear, feel, better than other men. His will be a deeper and finer experience. We do not learn by inference and deduction and the application of mathematics to philosophy, but by direct intercourse and sympathy. It is with science as with ethics,--we cannot know the truth by contrivance and method; the Baconian is as false as any other, and with all the helps of machinery and the arts, the most scientific will still be the healthiest and friendliest man, and possess a more perfect Indian wisdom. (161-62)

Some critics see this passage as Thoreau's condemnation of empirical scientific observation.⁵⁴ Certainly Thoreau does not advocate whole-heartedly adopting empiricism, as shown by his statement of the importance of "direct intercourse and sympathy." They read this section as an example of Thoreau's overt romanticism which asserts the primacy of the individual imagination over scientific analysis in the human relationship with nature. This reading certainly has merit in that Thoreau does stress the importance of the individual's "sympathy," and it does anticipate a later conflict for Thoreau and his relationship with scientific observation, but this conflict does not occupy a large part of his journal until the later forties and fifties.⁵⁵ And

⁵⁴ Kevin Van Anglen, for example, overstates the case claiming:

When Thoreau declares that the Baconian method is only as false as any other, his point is in part, therefore, surely to refute the central claim of the *Novum Organum* as later of Linnaeus' *Systema Naturae*: that it is impossible to create an accurate and complete account of the natural world on the basis of human reason and detached observation alone. (123).

What Van Anglen ignores is the long tradition of natural historian/minister who does not as easily differentiate between the "scientific" and "literary" as Van Anglen does. Certainly Thoreau has concerns about Baconianism, but the continual valorization of the scientific view throughout the text is not suddenly undercut at the end.

⁵⁵ James McIntosh's *Thoreau as Romantic Naturalist: His Shifting Stance Toward Nature* is representative of this view, and Max Oelschlaeger's *The Idea of Wilderness* claims that:

Thoreau is not advocating scientific book burning but is seeking a kind of cognitive balance, an 'Indian wisdom' that restores organic qualities to a world of scientific quantities and reintegrates human consciousness with the cognizable world. The seeker

these critics avoid noting the American scientific background from which Thoreau is critiquing Baconianism. During this time, "Baconianism" strictly meant that:

... all possible facts on a given subject should be collected, all possible experiments performed, and all the results classified; and that only then should a general law be framed to describe their relationship. By then the law would appear almost of itself (68 Bruce).

Such an approach would not be at odds with natural theology (whose purpose it is to observe God's laws), except when the data is being collected without the purpose of constructing a higher law. What is important, though, is that American Baconianism in the 1840's was at a crossroads. As Robert Bruce claims:

of Indian wisdom is clearly not a classicist imposing timeless Virgilian and Homeric categories on nature. Rather the search is for presocial meaning through primary experience in the wilderness, through encounter with a nonhuman other outside the domain of conventional wisdom. (139)

Yet Oelschlaeger does not address Thoreau's own classicist references in his description of Massachusetts flora and fauna which reflect both scientific qualities and Homeric categories. I am sympathetic to this shift in Thoreau's descriptions of nature, but I believe it takes place after his first visit to Ktaadn. To see this strong of a shift so early in Thoreau's natural histories reflects more the preference of contemporary readers for his later descriptions than it does Thoreau's own thinking.

Sattlemeyer in his "Introduction" claims that between the years of 1845 and 1855 Thoreau began to achieve "something approaching a professional competence as a naturalist. He began to botanize systematically, acquired a basic library of botanical guides, and learned taxonomy" (xix).

With American facts accumulating in quantities undreamed of by Bacon and no end in sight, they ['American preachers of Baconianism'] despaired of final generalizations and spoke as though classification alone should be the goal. (68)

This focus on "classification alone" is at odds with Thoreau's claim that the reading of natural history can restore "the tone of the system," even if one reads the Reports, which are mostly composed of facts. The problem is not so much with the reporting of facts; it is that the facts must someday "flower into a truth."⁵⁶ According to my reading, the distinction Thoreau makes here has more to do with the difference between the closet and field naturalist in American science than it does with a rejection of neo-classical natural theology.⁵⁷ When Thoreau claims:

... the true man of science will know nature better by his finer organization; he will smell, taste, see, hear, feel, better than other men. His will be a deeper and finer experience (161)

his concern is that the natural historian is a field naturalist whose experience is "direct intercourse and sympathy," not a closet naturalist whose concerns are restricted to "inference and deduction." Thus, Thoreau

⁵⁶ Hildebidle comes closest to my argument (100).

⁵⁷ See this discussion in Chapter 2.

states in the last line, "the most scientific will still be the healthiest and friendliest man, and possess a more perfect Indian wisdom." When one becomes a "true man of science" and participates not only in the gathering of information or data in the field but also in the observation of universal patterns, then he will possess "a more perfect Indian wisdom."⁵⁸

"NHM" is Thoreau's first attempt in the genre of natural history. It rambles in part because its dual intent to be both a review of natural histories and a natural history itself; therefore, much of essay turns upon itself as it tries to describe natural phenomena and to evaluate what is a quality description of natural phenomena. "NHM," though, does give the reader Thoreau's earliest views of natural history and natural science, reflecting his adherence to aspects of natural theology.

Thoreau's second natural history is "A Walk to Wachusett," published in *Boston Miscellany of Literature* (January, 1843); it is a travel account of a walk with Richard Fuller, the brother of Margaret Fuller. Margaret Fuller had persuaded Richard to come to Concord before entering Harvard, and Thoreau tutored him while Richard

⁵⁸ For this reason, critics ignore Thoreau's overt commodification of animal because neo-classical natural theology developed in part from pastoralism, which views nature in a passive relationship with humanity and philosophically fits well within the Enlightenment ideology that science and technology could lead to the improvement of nature (i.e. Bacon).

lived in Concord (Harding, *The Days*, 133). The essay describes their four-day trip to the summit of Wachusett during mid-July, 1841.

"AWW" is Thoreau's first travel narrative, and the travel/journey motif Thoreau invested in his narrative has a long, historical tradition both in American and Classical literature.⁵⁹ In addition, Thoreau embeds into this travel narrative pastoral qualities (the journey itself was through primarily idyllic landscape). By linking his writing to these traditions, he makes his narrator a recognizable type. And by using that type, Thoreau is participating in a sort of trans-historical moment.⁶⁰ By trans-historical, I mean that early Thoreau wants to narrate his experiences in terms that suggest that they are repeating previous historical moments. The heroic literature of nineteenth-century American literature uses certain pastoral elements (the virtuous outdoorsman, the necessity of using the regenerative powers of idyllic nature, and the possibility of redefining oneself outside civilization), and these are taken from a variety of pastoral traditions. Yet one should not ignore that these motifs were all part of the field naturalist tradition

⁵⁹ Virtually every critic mentions that "AWW" is Thoreau's first travel narrative and representative of the structure of his later works.

⁶⁰ See also Robert Sattlemeyer's "Introduction" (xvi-xvii).

(e.g. White and Walton). Thus early Thoreau does note a tension between the scientific and the sentimental.⁶¹

The central structure of the essay is quite obvious: going to the mountain, being on the mountain, and leaving the mountain (Lane 1). The first lines of "AWW" suggest the literary tradition Thoreau intends to use:

Summer and winter our eyes had rested on the dim outline of the mountains in our horizon, to which distance and indistinctness lent a grandeur not their own, so that they served equally to interpret all the allusions of poets and travelers; whether with Homer, on a spring morning, we sat down on the many-peaked Olympus, or with Virgil and his compeers roamed the Etrurian and Thessalian hills, or with Humboldt measured the more modern Andes and Teneriffe. (163)

Thoreau makes a number of claims: that their watching the mountains has been a long term process (not temporary and individual); that the "distance and indistinctness" suggest "a grandeur not their own" to the mountains; and that this

⁶¹ James McIntosh, who ignores the field naturalist tradition from which Thoreau is writing, says:

I find in it two Thoreaus, two narrators for the same excursion. The first is a Tasso-like poet, above the mundane earth and its rudimentary citizens and in touch with a deeper harmony. The second is a factually inclined surveyor of the *kosmos*. The resulting conflict remains in uneasy balance at the heart of the essay. (130-31)

This distinction is not one Thoreau would make. Being "factually inclined" and "in touch with a deeper harmony" is not anomalous to a field naturalist.

"distance and indistinctness" allows Thoreau to read into them "all the allusions of poets and travelers" despite the differing historical circumstances and despite the fact that these allusions are not to the same mountains.⁶² These claims are representative of Thoreau's descriptions of nature throughout "AWW." Thoreau wants their quest to resonate with quests throughout human history; thus he constantly reminds the reader that their quest is like *Rasselas'*, *Homer's*, or *Virgil's*. The mountaintop scene plays a relatively minor role in "AWW": the bulk of the text has to do with viewing the pastoral landscape or viewing the mountains from a distance. Most significantly, the more "distance" Thoreau has from the natural objects he is describing the better he can connect his descriptions to classical and pastoral tropes and reveal universal patterns. Thus, the literary illusions Thoreau uses are intended to connect his descriptions to repeated instances in history to recreate trans-historical moments that suggest universal laws.

GOING TO THE MOUNTAIN

When the decision is made that they will walk to

⁶² Frederick Garber says of this passage: Most important, however, is what the sentence says about the related ways in which we read landscapes and texts. To start off with distance and indistinctness means, in this context, to make space for sufficient fictions, adequate to illuminate a range of relevant truths. (127)

Wachusett, Thoreau immediately places their quest in the tradition of quests:

At length, like Rasselas, and other inhabitants of happy valleys, we resolved to scale the blue wall which bounds the western horizon, though not without misgivings that thereafter no visible fairy land would exist for us. But we will not leap at once to our journey's end, though near, but imitate Homer, who conducts his reader over the plain, and along the resounding sea, though it be but to the tent of Achilles. (165-66)

Thoreau forewarns the reader that they, like Samuel Johnson's Rasselas, who looks for greater happiness than exists in Happy Valley, might find that the mountain itself is not as pleasing as the indistinct view of it suggests, and Thoreau heightens the anticipation by telling the reader that she must wait till the end to know the outcome. But this kind of rhetorical manoeuvre is in keeping with the quest motif, for the hero must risk something in his quest; otherwise the journey itself has no purpose. Also note that Thoreau openly claims to be patterning his text after Homer. Thoreau continues on the same page to fix his text within the classical heroic quest tradition:

As we traversed the cool woods of Acton, with stout staves on our hands, we were cheered by the song of the red-eye, the thrushes, the phoebe, and the cuckoo;

and we passed through open country, we inhaled the fresh scent of every field, and all nature lay passive, to be viewed and traveled. (166)

They do not actually see "the red-eye, the thrushes, the phoebe, and the cuckoo"; they hear their songs. And "the open country" through which they are passing "lay passive," allowing their traveling and their viewing. One reason that "all nature lay passive" is that Thoreau's literal view was horizontal, not looking up, so there were not the indistinct qualities of the mountains which allowed for the allusions of poets. Another reason is that the landscape Thoreau is describing is farmland, which "lay[s] passive" for human use. The quest itself necessarily makes "all nature lay passive" in order to reaffirm the journey motif and link it to its classical models. I will discuss this more near the end of the analysis of "AWW," but the reader should keep this in mind throughout this study. Thoreau reaffirms the static quality of the landscape (its passivity) as they near Wachusett:

It [the highlands overlooking Lancaster] was such a place as one feels to be on the outside of the earth; for from it we could, in some measure, see the form and structure of the globe. There lay Wachusett, the object of our journey, lowering upon us with unchanged proportions, though with a less ethereal aspect than had greeted our morning gaze, while further north, in

successive order, slumbered its sister mountain along the horizon. (169)

As they reach the foothills, Thoreau remarks that with a different angle of view, they can see in the valley "in some measure, see the form and structure of the world." The primary difference between this passage and the previous one is the angle of view. And while their literal angle of view of Wachusett has changed, it has not changed "proportions." It appears "less ethereal," and it is compared with its sister mountain which "slumbers" or also awaits viewing. Thoreau at this point turns inward from their journey and assesses "by what myriad tests a work of genius [literary text] has to be tried" (169). He answers this question by allegorizing mountain ranges as human history:

This life so raw and modern, that so civil and ancient; and we read Virgil, mainly to be reminded of the identity of human nature in all ages, and, by the poet's own account, we are both children of a late age, and live equally under the reign of Jupiter. The old world stands serenely behind the new, as one mountain yonder towers behind another, more dim and distant. (169-70)

Here his look is not at nature but at the patterns in nature which give meaning to human life and history. Thus, here, the mountains which lay immediately before Thoreau

and Fuller appear too easily as symbols; whereas, later Thoreau continually subverts use of symbols.

As they near the mountain, Thoreau says that their actions are patterned consciously after the quest:

As we gathered the raspberries, which grew in abundance by the roadside, we fancied that that action was consistent with a lofty prudence; as if the traveler who ascends into a mountainous region should fortify himself by eating of such light ambrosial fruits as grow there, and drinking of the springs which gush out from the mountain sides, as he gradually inhales the subtler and purer atmosphere of those elevated places, thus propitiating the mountain gods by a sacrifice of their own fruits. (174)

As Thoreau and Fuller gird their loins and make their offerings to the gods, Thoreau avoids any sort of systematic description of the landscape. This is consistent with most natural histories adhering to natural theology because of the most of these writers were amateur scientists and because their audience was primarily a general audience. The raspberries become "light ambrosial fruits." Virtually all of Thoreau's descriptions of nature to this point lack any specificity or close observation. His descriptions serve to reaffirm the literary tradition from which Thoreau wishes to speak, thus establishing the "genius" of his work.

I would like to point out, though, one intriguing passage within this section of "AWW." Thoreau states:

... we, wayfarers, begin to learn that man's life is rounded with the same few facts, the same simple relations everywhere, and it is vain to travel to find it new. The flowers grow more various ways than he. But coming soon to a higher land, which afforded a prospect of the mountains, we thought we had not traveled in vain, if it were only to hear a truer and wilder pronounciation of their names from the lips of the inhabitants; not *Way-tatic*, *Way-chusett*, but *Wor-tatic*, *Wor-chusett*. It made us ashamed of our tame and civil pronounciation, and we looked upon them as born and bred farther west than we. Their tongues had a more generous accent than ours, as if breath was cheaper where they wagged. A country-man, who speaks seldom, talks copiously, as it were, as his wife sets cream and cheese before you without stint. (168)

This kind of close analysis and appreciation of local pronounciation anticipates the concerns of Thoreau's later natural histories. As Thoreau becomes more aware of how the names for things shape the way we see them, he adopts similar listings of pronounciations but from many more sources.

ON THE MOUNTAIN

As the travellers near the peak of Wachusett, Thoreau heightens its sense of unfamiliarity by describing the change in landscape. As they ascend past the tree-line, he emphasizes its foreign quality:

In due time we began to ascend the mountain, passing, first, through a grand sugar-maple-wood, which bore the marks of the auger, then a denser forest, which gradually became dwarfed, till there were no trees what ever. We at length pitched our tent on the summit. It is nineteen hundred feet above the village of Princeton, and three thousand above the level of the sea; but by this slight elevation, it is infinitely removed from the plain, and when we reached it we felt a sense of remoteness, as if we had traveled into distant regions, to Arabia Petraea, or the farthest east. (174-75)

Note the progression from a wood which bears the sign of utility to a "denser forest" which becomes smaller and smaller to a place where there is no cover whatsoever. Once on the summit, as though to recover some sense of distance, he gives the reader specific measurements of altitude but undercuts that method by claiming that the summit "is infinitely removed from the plain." Thoreau follows this scene with a brief, more scientific description of the natural objects on the summit:

The summit consists of a few acres, destitute of

trees, covered with bare rocks, interspersed with blueberry bushes, raspberries, gooseberries, strawberries, moss, and a fine wirey grass. The common yellow lily and dwarf-cornel grow abundantly in the crevices of the rocks. (175)

After this passage, however, they quickly retreat to their tent because "the weather was so hazy that it was in vain endeavored to unravel the obscurity" and "to voyagers of an aerial Polynesia, the earth seemed like a larger island in the ether" (176). In their tent, they pick up their books and again begin to align the landscape with other landscapes:

We read Virgil and Wordsworth in our tent, with new pleasure there, while waiting for a clearer atmosphere Who knows but this hill may one day be a Helvellyn, or even a Parnassus, and the Muses haunt here, and other Homers frequent the neighboring plains? (176)

This pattern of description is consistent throughout "AWW." While Thoreau may string some two or three lines of descriptions together that seem to focus on discrete moments and actions, he continually subordinates them to repetition--inevitably the landscape is brought back into a patterning with other landscape.⁶³ For example, when

⁶³ Robert Sattlemeyer's "A Walk to More than Wachusett" is the best article on "AWW" (2). And of the Wachusett itself Sattlemeyer claims:

night comes after their first day on the summit, Thoreau claims:

Truly the stars were given for a consolation to man.

.... We see laws which never fail, of whose failure we never conceived; and their lamps burn all the night, too, as well as all day,--so rich and lavish is that nature which can afford this superfluity of light. (178-79)

Interestingly, Thoreau's first clear view on the summit is of the stars, and in those stars are "laws which never fail." Thoreau's view of the valley comes the next day after he has already viewed universal laws from the summit. Thus, he did not have a fearful sublime moment on the summit (as he will on Ktaadn). He says:

There was little of the sublimity and grandeur which belong to mountain scenery, but an immense landscape to ponder on a summer's day. Wachusett is, in fact, the observatory of the State. There lay

All in all, Mt. Wachusett remained a pretty literary mountain, and Thoreau's view of it did not include the sort of close circumstantial detail that would characterize his later works --for the simple reason that he had not begun to train himself as a careful observer and naturalist, had not learned taxonomy or read much geology or New England history. (3 Sattlemeyer)

The only problem I have here with Sattlemeyer is that Thoreau did not know much systematic natural history at this time, but his journals suggest he had read other kinds of natural history. Perhaps Thoreau's descriptions are not so much the result of his ignorance of systematic natural history, but rather the result of the kind of natural history he was reading.

Massachusetts, spread out before like a map. (179-80)
 By viewing Massachusetts from so high a place, one can look down on the landscape and see the consistencies and regularities of a map (McIntosh 132). Thoreau continues this simile:

We could at length realize the place mountains occupy on the land, and how they come into the general scheme of the universe. When first we climb their summits and observe their lesser irregularities, we do not give credit to the comprehensive intelligence which shaped them; but when afterward we behold their outlines in the horizon, we confess that the hand which moulded their opposite slopes, making one to balance the other, worked round a deep centre, and was privy to the plan of the universe. So it is the least part of nature in its bearings referred to all space.
 (181)

When one is able to hold a perspective from the summit which takes into account a retrospective view of the "lesser irregularities" of other mountains (the intent of looking for a plan) and hold a view from the valley which observes "outlines in the horizon" (the particularities), the "general scheme of the universe" becomes apparent.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ James McIntosh says of this scene:
 Thus empirically Thoreau is working out his conception of nature as one and continuous, systematic and creative. Wachusett is part of the system; it belongs to Appalachia. From the vantage point of his

It is not a moment which invalidates his previous experiences, but a moment in which they are affirmed in a divine plan.

FROM THE MOUNTAIN

As they begin their descent, Thoreau comments on the landscape and makes brief mention of its particular history:

At noon we descended the mountain, and, having returned to the abodes of men, turned our faces to the east again; by the more ethereal hues which the mountain assumed. ... There is an unexpected refinement about this scenery; level prairies of great extent, interspersed with elms and hop-fields and groves of trees, give it almost a classic appearance. This, it will be remembered, was the scene of Mrs. Rowlandson's capture, and of other events in the Indian wars, but from this July afternoon, and under that mild exterior, those times seemed as remote as the irruption of the Goths. They were the dark age of New England. On beholding a picture of a New England

observatory, Thoreau can see that mountain ranges, the coastline and even the clouds in eastern America run from north-east to south-west and have direction and meaning within nature as a whole. The resulting structure exists in and for itself in this part of the essay. The immense landscape is Thoreau's center of attention, not the man who ponders it. (132)

village as it then appeared, with a fair open prospect, and a light on trees and river, as it were broad noon, we find we had not thought the sun shone in those days, or that men lived in broad daylight. We do not imagine the sun shining on hill and valley during Philip's war, nor on the warpath of Paugus, or Standish, or Church, or Lovell, with serene summer weather, but a dim twilight or night did those events transpire in. They must have fought in the shade of their own dusky deeds. (183-84)

Some have argued that here Thoreau gives up his hope to link his text to a pastoral and classical tradition.⁶⁵ Thoreau claims that the attributes of this landscape "give it almost a classic appearance," and while Thoreau admits the awful deeds that have been done in this landscape, "those times seem as remote as the irruption of the Goths" and were "fought in the shade of their own dusky deeds." Thoreau is obscuring American history rather than uncovering it, for he wants to bring into light the classical features of the landscape and its pan-historical

⁶⁵ James Schwartz argues:

As Thoreau 'descends' into a more recent historical realm, the seventeenth-century Indian wars, he fails to sustain a participatory role in the Golden Age of Homer and Virgil. Without the inspiration of the pastoral poets, Thoreau feels isolated--no longer entertaining transcendental relationship with the Hellvellyn Bards. When Thoreau returns from Wachusett, he is left only with himself and his fleeting recollections of an ideal relationship--regaining the Golden Age. (16)

attributes. What is at stake here is not just literary allusion but a view of history which determines Thoreau's views/descriptions of landscape. But a closer reading suggests the opposite.

Near the beginning of my critique of "AWW," I suggested that the reader keep in mind Thoreau's use of aspects of one kind of pastoralism--the quest itself making "all nature lay passive" in order to reaffirm the journey motif and link it to its classical models. In my estimation the nature of "AWW" "lays passive." Nature is consistently subsumed into Thoreau's larger purpose: to link his text with classical forms of writing, to speak not of the temporal but of the ageless and universal.⁶⁶ In brief moments in "AWW," Thoreau confronts distinction and wildness (i.e. the various pronunciations of "Wachusett" and the initial descriptions on the summit), but these moments are either anomalous within the text (the pronunciations) or arranged shortly afterwards into his

⁶⁶ Sattlemeyer makes this same claim but also sees in "AWW" attributes of his later natural histories:

In this essay we find him poised between the self-absorbed transcendental youth and the mature student of people and nature who speaks in his later essays, still clinging to the literary and artistic conventions of landscape description he had inherited but beginning to open himself up to that wider world around him, learning to narrate his experiences in a way that would render intelligible and meaningful his search for confirmation of his deepest instincts about the meaning of nature. (4 "A Walk to More than Wachusett")

grander purpose.⁶⁷ "AWW" is Thoreau's first attempt at a journey motif, which becomes a predominant form in his later writings (i.e. "Walking"), but as a natural history it lacks the heteroglossic qualities of his later works.

Thoreau's third natural history "A Winter Walk" was published in *The Dial*, October, 1843. Thoreau wrote "Walk" while he was working on "AWW." "Walk" does use much of the same ideology as "AWW." The structure of the essay is again linked to a quest motif, and his descriptions of nature tend toward classical analogies and thus link the natural phenomena to a universal law (thus conforming to natural theology).⁶⁸ Yet "Walk" also exhibits some

⁶⁷ On this topic, Richardson says:

The piece closes on a comfortable note as Thoreau praises hospitality, but what gives the piece life is the streak of wildness in the landscape and in the writing. Mount Wachusett beckons to him and haunts his dreams. The little essay looks forward to the great 'Ktaadn' piece that will focus on the wild, non-human tops of mountains, the raw material of the planet, the gardenless unhandsheld globe. (120)

Certainly the quest motif plays a significant part in "Ktaadn," but the wilderness/wildness present in that essay vastly differs from "AWW." In "Ktaadn" the hero is increasingly modified by the integration of the idea of wilderness, for when the hero is in a non-sympathetic landscape, he no longer is nurtured by nature but must rely on his instincts.

⁶⁸ James Schwartz claims:

His perception of natural phenomena still hovers within the bucolic realm of classical mythology and the Golden Age as he describes the midnight air The major difference between 'A Walk to Wachusett' and 'A Winter Walk,' however, is that in the latter Thoreau finally braves the bleakness of the physical world, discovering that the 'inward warmth' of his creative imagination is not sustained by Greek and Roman models but by nature. (16-17)

important differences from "AWW": the journey itself is far more individual than it is universal, in that the scale of the quest is less grand. The descriptions themselves exhibit more narrative duration than either of the previous natural histories and the season he is viewing is typically considered the most inhospitable; and at the end of the essay, Thoreau does not rely on harking back to classical models--either by format or by overt reference. As I mentioned earlier, "Walk" is structured according to a day; this organization allows Thoreau to avoid imposing a supposedly false organization on natural phenomena. Important, too, is the other structural method Thoreau employs: that of how one should spend one's winter days. These two organizing principles play upon each other: as nature's organization (the course of a day) determines when one wakes, rises, moves about, and sleeps, it broadly determines the essay's structure; the other structural method (that of how to spend one's winter days) determines the pace, movement, and perspective of the text (waking, walking, skating, returning, retiring for the evening).⁶⁹

I agree with Schwartz.

⁶⁹ Max Oelschlaeger claims that: Thoreau wishes to emphasize natural rhythms, the slow pace increasing as waking gives way to walking. Within a few pages Thoreau strikes a pace--that shows him as the very 'true man of science' addressed in 'Natural History.' Sauntering through the winter landscape, free of the parlor's din, he establishes an intuitive bond with nature. (140)

I agree with Oelschlaeger that Thoreau wants imbue the

Thoreau's hope in "Walk" is to intertwine these two structures because the more his narrator can conform his daily life to nature's universal patterns the more he participates in them like the stoic sage.

In "Walk" Thoreau assumes a temporal structure that begins before dawn and concludes in the evening after sunset. In the first few lines of the essay, the narrator describes pre-dawn nature:

The wind has gently murmured through the blinds, or puffed with feathery softness against the windows, and occasionally sighed like a summer zephyr lifting the leaves along, the livelong night. The meadow-mouse has slept in his snug gallery in the sod, the owl has sat in a hollow tree in the swamp, the rabbit, the squirrel, and the fox have been housed. But while the earth has slumbered, all the air has been alive with feathery flakes descending, as if some northern Ceres reigned, showering her silvery grain over all the fields." (199)

This description begins within the house and moves outward, preparing the reader for the future motion. "The wind" has "murmured" and "sighed" but has not disturbed the sleeping narrator inside the house any more than it has disturbed

narrator with qualities of the field naturalist, but I would not argue as strongly that the daily life structure is "naturally rhythmic." This structure uses a journey motif and as a quest it is intended to impart meaning into nature, not have nature pace itself.

the "housed" animals outside. Thoreau paradoxically uses the myth of Ceres, the goddess of the grain harvest, to describe the fallen snow. He uses this myth to emphasize the "inward warmth" one achieves when becoming closer to nature's patterns even in winter, but his simile is not classical in its linking Ceres and snow. He is manipulating these tropes in ways not used in classical texts, but his intent is not to subvert their relevance to a contemporary reader but to reaffirm their permanence.

WAKING

In the following paragraph, Thoreau begins employing his other organizing method. Thoreau uses a first person plural pronoun as a way to draw the reader into the journey but also to universalize his experiences:

We sleep, and at length awake to the still reality of a winter morning. The snow lies warm as cotton or down upon the window-sill; the broadened sash and frosted panes admit a dim and private light, which enhances the snug cheer within. The floor creaks under our feet as we move toward the window to look abroad through some clear space over the fields.

.... (200)

Thoreau is much more concerned in "Walk" than in "AWW" to provide a context of specific place from which views are made. From the bed we can only view the snow on the

window-sill; once at the window, we can see broader views.

WALKING

The narrator continues the movement in the following paragraph by stepping over the threshold and going out-of-doors. When he does so he describes the morning: "A lurid brazen light in the east proclaims the approach of the day, while the western landscape is dim and spectral still, clothed in a sombre Tartarian light, like the shadowy realms" (200). However, the seemingly dangerous western landscape does not become a predominant theme in "Walk." This description has more to do with the narrator's initial reaction to leaving the home than it does with the potential for a fearful (sublime) moment in nature, for soon "the sun at length rises through the distant woods ..." and "his rays are gilding the distant western mountains" (203). Immediately following this lighting of the dimness of the west, the narrator states:

Meanwhile we step hastily along through the powdery snow, warmed by an inward heat, enjoying an Indian summer still, in the increased glow of thought and feeling. Probably if our lives were more conformed to nature, we should not need to defend ourselves against her heats and colds, but find her our constant nurse and friend, as do plants and quadrupeds. (203-04)

Remember the initial description Thoreau uses in "Walk"--

that the animals are housed just as we are housed. The descriptions of nature in "Walk" are typically couched in terms of domesticity. But Thoreau is inverting the typical image of domesticity by suggesting that we, too, may shelter ourselves in nature ("need not defend ourselves against her heats and colds") the more we "conform ourselves to nature"--here meaning understanding its universal patterns. The warmth of the hearth comes from recognizing what is the larger shelter:

All things beside seem to be called in for shelter, and what stays out must be part of the original frame of the universe, and of such valor as God himself. It is invigorating to breathe the cleansed air. Its greater fineness and purity are visible to the eye, and we would fain stay out long and late, that the gales may sigh through us, too, as through the leafless trees, and fit us for winter,--as if we hoped to borrow some pure and steadfast virtue, which will stead us in all seasons. There is a slumbering subterranean fire in nature, which never goes out, and which no cold can chill. (204-05)

For Thoreau, one can recognize what is "part of the original frame of the universe" or the universal shelter by acknowledging that which remains outside human shelters in winter. Note, too, what the narrator himself is doing--getting outside and attempting to organize his daily

routine to that "original frame of the universe." As he moves farther away from his own dwelling and human dwellings altogether, he comes nearer to crossing over the threshold of nature's shelter:

At length, having reached the edge of the woods, and shut out the gadding town, we enter within their covert as we go under the roof of a cottage, and cross its threshold, all ceiled and banked with snow. It seems to us that no traveler has ever explored them, and notwithstanding the wonders which science is elsewhere revealing every day, who would not like to hear their annals? (206)

The opposition in this passage is not to science *per se* so much as to "the gadding town," which does not hear the wood's annals. This view of science is not the same as that in "NHM," where "facts" "flower into truths"; science, here, is revealing "wonders" daily but has yet to "explore" these woods and listen to their "annals." The opposition has more to do with those who do not cross the threshold of the woods and dwell near its hearth; science may, but has not yet "explored" these woods.

Thoreau's choices of and descriptions of natural phenomena in "Walk" also reflect his preoccupation with domesticity:

Stretched over the brooks, in the midst of the frost-bound meadows, we may observe the submarine cottages

of the cattice worms, the larvae of the Plicipennes
 Anon they will leave their sunken habitations,
 and crawling up the stems of plants, or to the
 surface, like gnats, as perfect insects henceforth,
 flutter over the surface of the water, or sacrifice
 their short lives in the flame of our candles at
 evening. (208)

His choice of natural phenomena allows him to reinforce the images of domesticity and the hearth. The reader should also note the difference in this description (duration) and that of the two previous natural histories. Thoreau is able to hold his view of this particular object much longer: giving us such specifics as the shape of the larval protection ("their small cylindrical cases built around themselves"), its physical composition ("flags, sticks, grass, and withered leaves, shells, and pebbles"), and its relative stability ("now drifting along over the pebbly bottom, now whirling in tiny eddies ashing down steep falls, or sweeping rapidly along current, or else swaying to and fro at the end of some blade or root").⁷⁰

INTO THE WOODMAN'S HUT

As the narrator continues his journey into the woods, he comes across a woodman's hut that causes him to "...

⁷⁰ Thoreau stresses the motion and seeming instability by using "now" twice.

have such associations as when a traveler stands by the ruins of Palmyra or Hecatompolis" (210). Thoreau's use of these ancient cities (Syrian and Greek) prepares the reader for his next rhetorical move:

See how many traces from which we may learn the chopper's history. From this stump we may guess the sharpness of this ax, and from the slope of the stroke, and which side he stood, and whether he cut down the tree without going round it or changing hands; and from the flexure of the splinters, we may know which way it fell. This one chip contains inscribed on it the whole history of the wood-chopper and of the world. (211)

As in sections of "AWW," Thoreau is not as attentive to the literal object as to the universal design it has "inscribed on it." Such natural theology determines the method of description by obfuscating a clear view. In this passage what seems to be a close inspection of the stump to learn something of the wood-chopper's history is instead a comment on the blade's inscription of the history "of the world." Reinforcing the necessity of distance to understand universal patterns, Thoreau later comments on pickerel fishers:

The actions of these men, at the distance of half a mile over the ice and snow, impress us as when we read the exploits of Alexander in history. They seem not

unworthy of the scenery, and as momentous as the conquest of kingdoms. (214)

He can make them analogous to Alexander only when he cannot see them up close. As in "AWW," distance and vagueness help one to see universal patterns, but this method of viewing does not dominate "Walk" as it does the previous natural histories. For as the pace of the narrator's locomotion increases, so, too, does the amount of wildness the narrator allows into the landscape.

ON SKATES

Near the end of "Walk," the pace of the narrative quickens as the narrator dons his skates:

Before night we will take a journey on skates along the course of this meandering river ... following the winding of the stream, now flowing amid hills, now spreading out into fair meadows, and forming a myriad coves and bays where the pine and hemlock overarch. The river flows in the rear of the towns, and we see all things from a new and wilder side. (216-17)

The sentences themselves in this section become as quick and short as the literal motion of his observation (which is reminiscent of the movement of the cattice worms in the river represented by the repetition of "now"). As he is able to take in more and more information because of his speed in skating, the narrator incorporates elements of

wildness into his view:

In these wild scenes, men stand about in the scenery, or move deliberately and heavily, having sacrificed the sprightliness and vivacity of towns to the dumb sobriety of nature. He [pickerel fisher] does not make the scenery less wild, more than the jays and musk-rats, but stands there as a part of it, as the natives are represented in the voyages of early navigators, at Nootka Sound, and on the Northwest coast, with their furs about them, before they were tempted to loquacity by a scrap of iron. (220)

Yet he does not consider himself a part of the same wildness he extends to the fishermen. Thoreau contrasts his own locomotion with the static posture of the fishermen; in fact, they participate more fully in the landscape because they "move deliberately and heavily." They are wild because they stand "there as part of it"; the comparison with Native Americans has more to do with both primitivism or lack of social "vivacity" than it does with their knowledge of how to be a part of it. So, even while Thoreau is incorporating notions of wildness into his text, he does not place himself within that same wildness.

RETURNING

Thoreau closes "Walk" with the falling of light snow. The snow signals the narrator's return to his home and

obscures his view:

But now, while we have loitered, the clouds have gathered again, and a few straggling snowflakes are beginning to descend. Faster and faster they fall, shutting out the distant objects from sight. (221)

But as is consistent with early Thoreau, the more his view is obscured, the more the vagueness comforts him by suggesting universal patterns. In vagueness, the narrator can perceive patterns, for in vagueness, objects tend toward similarity and repetition.

CONCLUSION

Robert Sattlemeyer claims that these three essays "testify that Thoreau was still an admirer of nature whose enthusiasm and gifted amateur eye masked the fact that he knew relatively little systematic natural history" (xviii "Introduction). I firmly agree with this assessment, yet it does not preclude Thoreau's background in natural theology and his early reading of less systematic natural histories. In these three texts, Thoreau's descriptions of natural phenomena typify natural theology and its method of natural history; preferring a distant and vague view to a distinct and precise one; aligning the American landscape with Greek and Roman landscapes; allegorizing the landscape in order to see evidence of universal patterns; and adopting classical and pastoral motifs in order to give his

texts a trans-historical quality.⁷¹ In other words, early Thoreau seeks to invest his descriptions with literary allusions and methodologies that suggest that his text participates in those instances in human history which inevitably repeat themselves out of their universal truth. Parts of these early essays, though, show a Thoreau in transition; these sections show his growing awareness of the broader implications of naming the landscape (his sensitivity to the differing pronunciations of Wachusett, the incorporation of notions of wildness) which becomes a significant part of his later works, but this change comes about in part because of his encounter with wildness, in part because of his questioning of transcendentalism, and in part because of his additional reading in natural history.

⁷¹ Max Oelschlaeger says of Thoreau's early descriptions:

'Natural History' and 'A Winter Walk' reveal a Thoreau in process, exploring the wilderness for meaning, and slowly progressing toward mastery of his medium of expression. An abstract quality, although muted, remains in these essays, which sometimes falls back on transcendental and classical--of experience, as he explores new methods of knowing. The Thoreauvian art form is yet imperfect, but the use of natural metaphors (for example, a healthy man has summer in his heart; the fisher has roots in nature) has ensued. (141)

Chapter IV

The Gardenless Wild

Dennoch, wir wissen ihn zu nennen, wir raten ...
Und Erinnerung geht zu ihm über,
die wir von rufbaren Stunden erbatnen. (*Die Sonnette an Orpheus*, Rilke)

Joe said they called the chickadee *kecunniessu* in his language. I will not vouch for the spelling of what possibly was never spelt before, but I pronounced after him till he said it would do. ("Chesuncook," Thoreau)

Wild nature is probably equally goofy, with a stunning variety of creatures somehow getting by in all these landscapes. Nature also means the physical universe, including the urban, industrial, and toxic. But we do not easily know nature, or even know ourselves. Whatever it actually is, it will not fulfill our conceptions or assumptions. It will dodge our expectations and theoretical models. There is no set 'nature' either as the natural world or 'the nature of things.' The greatest respect we can pay to nature is not to trap it, but to acknowledge that it eludes us and that our own nature is also fluid, open, and conditional. ("Preface," *No Nature*, Gary Snyder)

The Maine Woods, a posthumous publication (1864) edited by Sophia Thoreau and Ellery Channing, consists of three essays: "Ktaadn," published in five installments from July through November, 1848, in *Sartain's Union Magazine*; "Chesuncook," published in serial form from June through August, 1858 in *Atlantic Monthly*; and "The Allegash and the East Branch," an unpublished manuscript which Thoreau was editing at the time of his death. The book is not cohesive text in that the essays clearly do not refer to each other, nor are they clearly similar in style or narrative voice. One reason for these differences is that they comprise three distinct journeys to Maine over some ten years: "Ktaadn," based on an excursion taken in August and September, 1846; "Chesuncook," based on an excursion taken in September, 1853; and "The Allegash and East Branch,"

based on an excursion taken in July and August, 1857 (*The New Thoreau Handbook* 64). Another reason is that *The Maine Woods* represents an enormous period of change for Thoreau. During this time (comprising over half of his writing years), Thoreau published *A Week*, seriously questioned the Transcendentalism of his previous years⁷², began studying systematic natural history instead of the Linnaean system, began studying Native American culture (particularly the Penobscot language), and published *Walden*.⁷³ For my purposes, these changes in Thoreau's thinking are significant because they have a profound effect on his method of naming the landscape. Maine was not marginal land like the woods around Concord. Here Thoreau was confronted with wilderness for the first time.⁷⁴ This

⁷² By Transcendentalism I mean that philosophical idealism wherein one believes that the universe is ultimately intelligible and decipherable through either reason (Thoreau's early Baconianism) or intuition (imaginative interpretation).

⁷³ In this dissertation I will not be dealing with *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers* and *Walden* for two reasons: first, those texts do not clearly fit my stipulative definition of natural history (even though good work could be done with Thoreau's interest in Native American names for the Concord River and "The Ponds" in *Walden*) and second, I could not fit such large texts into an already broad analysis.

⁷⁴ By wilderness I mean that landscape which seemingly has not been disturbed by human intervention, though this is a difficult definition because Thoreau comes to celebrate Penobscot life within those woods. For my own purposes, I would prefer to think of these encounters as wilderness experiences. Max Oelschlaeger claims of the wilderness experience that it "... is necessary to any grounded understanding of human beingness and articulation

confrontation with wilderness causes Thoreau to question his transcendental methods of naming of nature.⁷⁵ As he becomes less sanguine about Transcendentalism as a method of interacting with nature, Thoreau uses fewer classical references in his descriptions, and the descriptions themselves become narrower, and more specific about natural phenomena as opposed to the broad scope, preferably vague views of his earlier natural histories.⁷⁶ Because of this change, his method of naming in these three essays becomes increasingly heteroglossic through the addition of scientific nomenclature, Native American names, and local folklore (even that of loggers). By heteroglossic I mean specifically that Thoreau's method of naming becomes more paradoxical. As he becomes increasingly aware of his inability to merge these discordant acts of labeling and to

of individual identity. We can be what we are capable of being only if we have some sense of what we are not" (9). While I do not know if Thoreau came to any understanding as to what he was "capable of being," he does encounter for the first time a landscape which he cannot describe with his previous tropes. Thus many of the descriptions are negations of how Maine is *not* Massachusetts.

⁷⁵ As I discussed in the previous chapter, this method of naming typically uses broad, more distant scope in his descriptions in order to see universal patterns. In addition, this method of naming allegorizes the natural phenomena as a symbol for human existence so as to re-enact trans-historical moments.

⁷⁶ I should point out that this argument implicitly makes an ethical claim. This ethical claim is that the more the those who focus on the contingency of subjectivity in the naming process are more willing to grant a notion of respect to nature as phenomenal other. To my mind, the Snyder passage addresses this ethics.

accurately describe the natural world, the method of narration in each of his natural histories becomes increasingly layered.

KTAADN

"Ktaadn" is perhaps the most debated text in the Thoreau canon. Critics argue as to whether the last few pages (his ascent of Katahdin and the "Burnt Lands" section) are Thoreau's emphatic rejection of Transcendental philosophy or his acceptance of a more fearful sublime moment into what was until then a rather pastoral, blithe kind of philosophy.⁷⁷ "Ktaadn" certainly suggests some

⁷⁷ Many critics do not see any radical shift for Thoreau in this essay. Sherman Paul argues that "Ktaadn" is a minor text and does not constitute any significant change in Thoreau's transcendentalism (357-69). McIntosh says, "The Katahdin experience seems to have little direct effect on Thoreau's youthful; romantic point of view" (210). Others, such as Ronald Hoag, suggest this essay signals a darker, more sublime romanticism on Thoreau's part (24). Still others argue that the essay shows Thoreau's rejection of transcendentalism altogether. For example, Max Oelschlaeger claims, "... the position developed in 'Ktaadn' is antithetical to Emerson's philosophy, the final step in Thoreau's development from transcendentalism to a genuine relation to the universe" (149). To my mind, these readings are too extreme in their assessment of this essay.

For my reading, John Tallmadge's "'Ktaadn': Thoreau in the Wilderness of Words" provides the most useful discussion of the essay. Tallmadge suggests:

It ['Ktaadn'] exposes the inadequacy of received modes of conceiving and representing the natural world and calls attention to the duplicity of language, which can constitute as well as describe experience. (138)

Such a reading forwards my own and suggests Thoreau's growing awareness of the gap between signifier and signified, particularly in his previous modes of naming. The last two sections of *The Maine Woods* (as well as the

re-evaluation of Transcendentalism just by the sheer erratic language and style of the summit and descent scenes, but the reader needs to keep in mind that as Thoreau was writing "Ktaadn," he was also finishing *A Week*. In addition he was living at Walden. For this study, though, what is important about the scene are the changes in Thoreau's descriptions. Up until that point in this essay, the narrator participates in more or less similar strategies to those of the first three essays, the quest motif and distant, holistic views of the landscape. After this scene, though, the narrator no longer clearly follows the typical quest motif, and there are no classical references in the descriptions.⁷⁸ (Thoreau even anticipates his method of naming in the latter two essays by considering the life of the primitive or "the red face of man".)

"Ktaadn" uses, as I said in the previous chapter, a similar quest motif to "A Walk to Wachusett": the leaving of his society, the encounter with locals along the way, the ascent of the mountain, the view from the mountaintop, the descent, and the return to society (representing the attainment of a more noble view). In "Ktaadn," though, the

latter natural histories) show this same awareness.

⁷⁸ By "holistic view" I mean a view of the landscape which suggests a congruence or harmony between landscape and human meaning. Thoreau never returns to such a view in his natural histories without trepidation and retrospect.

last three parts of the motif (the view from the mountain and the return to society) are frustrated by the mountaintop experience and do not follow the traditional quest motif. Thoreau's encounter with phenomenal wilderness denies him the ability to structure his experience according to his previous methods.

Till then, Thoreau's descriptions of nature are similar to his earlier ones: their preference for distant views; their classical references; and their allegorical use of the landscape. Like the previous texts, these descriptions are both a product of and serve to reinforce the quest motif of the majority of "Ktaadn." For example, Thoreau avoids particularities in describing his visit to a community:

At sundown, leaving the river road awhile for shortness, we went by way of Enfield, where we stopped for the night. This, like most of the localities bearing names on this road, was a place to name which, in the midst of the unnamed and unincorporated wilderness, was to make a distinction without a difference, it seemed to me. (8)

He elides this town with all the others by establishing their locality as a wilderness. If there is a wilderness which surrounds these communities, then there is no way to distinguish their character or townspeople. Here, also, is an early example of Thoreau's awareness of the

impossibility of naming phenomenal wilderness because of its distinct Otherness. Thoreau follows this comment by noticing that someone in this community has an orchard, yet it is "all natural fruit and comparatively worthless for want of a grafter" (9). He concludes that these people would be benefitted if "a Massachusetts boy [were] to go down there with a trunk full of choice scions" (9). The only way Thoreau can make a distinction here in this community is by grafting a pastoral background onto it. As for the earliest view of Katahdin itself, Thoreau says:

... Ktaadn presented a different aspect from any mountain I have seen, there being a greater proportion of naked rock rising abruptly from the forest; and we looked up at this blue barrier as if it were some fragment of a wall which anciently bounded the earth in that direction. (75)

Thoreau acknowledges that there are some distinctions to Katahdin (such as the rock rising from the trees). His description differs from his description of Wachusett: "Summer and winter our eyes had rested on the dim outline of the mountains in our horizon, to which distance and indistinctness lent a grandeur not their own" (163). But the description ends with a claim that the mountain is a "fragment" of something larger, less distinct and "ancient."

The classical references in "Ktaadn" are not nearly as

numerous as in the previous essays, but Thoreau does use classical references until the "Burnt Lands" section. For example, like the "light ambrosial fruits" and "the springs which gush out from the mountain sides" which supposedly prepared them to attain the summit in "AWW," here they drank "a draught of beer, which, it was allowed, would be better" (35). Thoreau says that, "It was as if we sucked at the very teats of Nature's pine-clad bosom in these parts ...the sap of all Millinocket botany commingled ... a lumberer's drink, which would acclimate and naturalize a man at once,--which would make him see green" (35). As in "AWW," the classical reference to Romulus and Remus serves to link the narrator and his companions with the pastoral notion that nature is the comforting mother and will provide for her children. Early descriptions of the mountains include references to "demigods" (59), and, standing on top of a promontory before he attained the peak, Thoreau states that the setting around him reminds him of:

... the creations of the old epic and dramatic poets, of Atlas, Vulcan, the Cyclops, and Prometheus. Such was Caucasus, and the rock where Prometheus was bound. Aeschylus had no doubt visited such scenery as this.

(85)

Thoreau describes a somewhat threatening scene before these references, in which he says that between the mist and

clouds he sometimes "caught sight of a dark, damp crag to the right or left" (85). This scene is very different from scenes in the previous natural histories, yet the important point here is that Thoreau struggles to retain old methods of naming such as classical references in the face of increasing questions of agency. This passage contains Thoreau's last classical reference in "Ktaadn" and shows his struggle to retain an old method of description in its non parallel list and choppy style.

Another example of Thoreau's adherence to a transcendental method of describing the landscape is his imposition of allegory on the landscape. In describing some fish that they had caught, he says:

... these bright fluviatile flowers, seen of Indians only, made beautiful, the Lord only knows why, to swim there! I could understand better for this, the truth of mythology, the fables of Proteus, and all those beautiful sea-monsters,--how all history, indeed, put to a terrestrial use, is mere history; but put to a celestial, is mythology always. (70-71)

Thoreau does not describe the fish (he cannot explain why such a beautiful creature would live in such a removed location, or more importantly, why it is removed from Anglos), but uses it to allegorize this situation to suit his ends by pointing out that "history" should focus on the "celestial," not the "terrestrial." Note, too, the

similarity to Thoreau's allegorizing the mountains in "AWW," when he writes, "The old world stands serenely behind the new, as one mountain yonder towers behind another, more dim and distant" (169-70). In another example of his allegorizing the landscape he uses the timber logs stranded on the shores. His companions are the owners of many of these logs (their mark is on them), and they lament that these logs may rot before a spring flood (freshet) comes to wash them down river. Thoreau says:

Methinks that must be where all my property lies, cast up on the rocks on some distant and unexplored stream, and waiting for an unheard of freshet to fetch it down. O make haste, ye gods, with your winds and rains, and start the jam before it rots! (69-70)

He uses the term "property" ironically, for Thoreau does not mean material gain for himself but transcendental understanding or spiritual gain. The interesting point in this allegory is that Thoreau ignores the commodification (trees to timber) which becomes in the latter two sections of *The Maine Woods* an important theme in his descriptions. As a matter of fact, "Ktaadn" never clearly addresses the issue of deforestation; the long description of the practice of logging does not consider any long-term ramifications (54-58). For my reading, his neglect of this issue has to do with an inherent contradiction within the American Transcendental movement--that it adheres to a kind

of pastoralism which commodifies the landscape, and yet it rejects technology.⁷⁹ Not until after Thoreau questions transcendentalism near the end of "Ktaadn" does he begin to question these timbering practices.

While Thoreau uses similar naming practices in "Ktaadn" as in his previous works, there are some important differences. These include his listing of his use of travel guides and maps, his incorporation of some scientific nomenclature, and his attempt to use some native names. These differences are significant because they look forward to his more heteroglossic naming practices in the last two sections and the remaining natural histories, yet in "Ktaadn" these do not represent the norm.⁸⁰

Thoreau's use of C. T. Jackson's various reports on the Maine landscape, Hodge's (the Assistant State Geologist) reports, and the copy of Greenleaf's Map of Maine, his references to Andre Michaux, and John Springer's *Forest Life and Forest Trees* (published in 1851; Thoreau added these references in a later revision of "Ktaadn"). These references serve two functions: to draw the reader's

⁷⁹ See Chapter 2 for a more complete discussion of this contradiction. I should point out again, though, that there other traditions of pastoralism which question notions of commodity.

⁸⁰ Unlike his previous natural histories which use little to no outside sources (other than "NHM" which does so because it is a review), *The Maine Woods*, especially by the last essay, is virtual repository of common names, scientific names, Penobscot names, and local folklore.

attention to the heroism of their adventure by aligning his narrative with the actions of previous heroes and to suggest his dependence on outside sources both in terms of mapping (following a guide) and in terms of accurately describing the Maine wilderness (some of these references are mapping names, some long quotes, and some footnotes). Again, Maine was not Thoreau's pastoral Massachusetts, and he had not until this point encountered wilderness.

In the second paragraph, the narrator aligns himself with those Anglos who have previously climbed:

Ktaadn, whose name is an Indian word signifying highest land, was first ascended by white men in 1804. It was visited by Professor J.W. Bailey of West Point in 1836; by Dr. Charles T. Jackson, the State Geologist, in 1837; and by two young men from Boston in 1845. All these have given accounts of their expeditions. Since I was there, two or three other parties have made the excursion, and told their stories. Besides these, very few, even among backwoodsmen and hunters, have ever climbed it, and it will be a long time before the tide of fashionable travel sets that way. (2)

Clearly, the narrator is trying to place himself within the tradition of the quest motif by stressing that it is not only the adventure itself that is important but also the return and telling of the story (that landscape and human

meaning elide). The heroism the narrator plays on is based on the individuality and bravery of these climbers who are unlike either the majority of society (those who prefer "fashionable travel") or natives of the area (both Native American and Anglo residents). As he says later, "Only daring and insolent men, perchance, go there. Simple races, as savages, do not climb mountains ..." (86). The narrator's interest here is to suggest a classical tradition in the text (as in "AWW"), and until the summit scene, "Ktaadn" reinforces the heroism Thoreau tries to instill in the text.

In other ways, though, the narrator's use of these outside sources suggests his growing awareness that he is in unfamiliar territory and cannot impose pastoral and traditional motifs on this landscape as he could do in Massachusetts. Maine was not familiar for Thoreau. For example, Thoreau naively copies Greenleaf's Map of Maine on an oiled sheet of paper, yet he later "ascertained [it] to be a labyrinth of errors" (18). Thus the narrator is consistently interested in confirming the group's locale by mapping references. For example, he states:

First, after leaving Ambejijis Lake, we had a quarter of a mile of rapids to the portage, or carry it ninety rods around Ambejijis Falls; then a mile and a half through Passamagamet Lake, which is narrow and river-like, to the falls of the same name,--Ambejijis stream

coming in on the right; then two miles through Katepskonegan Lake to the portage of ninety rods around Katepskonegan Falls, which name signifies 'carrying place,' (60)

And of the mapping process itself, Thoreau says:

This is generally the order of names as you ascend the river: First, the lake, or if there is no expansion, the dead-water; then the falls; then the stream emptying into the lake, or river above, all of the same name. This order and identity of names, it will be perceived, is quite philosophical, since the dead-water or lake is always at least partially produced by the stream emptying in above; and the first fall below, which is the outlet of that lake, and where that tributary water makes its first plunge, also naturally bears the same name. (61)

Thoreau's incorporation of these outside sources suggests a kind of early questioning of his old naming process (both out of necessity because he is not home and because his background is not sufficient).

In addition to his incorporation of these authors, Thoreau uses scientific names for the first time ("NHM" did list some scientific names but those were drawn from the Reports Thoreau was reviewing). The importance of his use of scientific names is that it signals Thoreau's growing desire for specificity. Ray Angelo claims that the first

time Thoreau uses "a scientific name for a native plant in his published work appears in 1848. The name 'pinus nigra' is found in the original version of the Ktaadn essay ..." (16).⁸¹ Thoreau changed this name (taken from Bigelow's *Medical Botany*) to *Abies nigra* (taken from Asa Gray's *Manual of Botany of Northern United States*) in 1851 when he was beginning to use the natural system of classification.⁸² Thoreau also uses two other scientific names in "Ktaadn," *Vaccinium Vitis-Idaea* (also from Gray's *Manual*) or "mountain cranberries" (29), which was added in 1851, and (*Leucisci pulchelli*) or "white chivin," a kind of fish (70). But this is not out of keeping with Thoreau's reading of and participation in more technical sciences

⁸¹ Angelo continues:

This was the name for black spruce (*Picea mariana*) used in Bigelow's manual. In a later version of the text Thoreau changed the name to that used in Asa Gray's manual, namely '*Abies nigra*,' and also inserted an additional latin name, '*Vaccinium vitis-idaea*.' Thoreau's background in classical languages and his delight in etymology attracted him to the Latin (and Greek) names of science. (16)

I believe that Thoreau's interest in the etymology of these names was more serious than Angelo claims, especially in "Wild Apples."

⁸² Interestingly Gray describes the black spruce's leaves as "much more appressed and shorter, the tree therefore less handsome, than the NORWAY SPRUCE (*A. excelsa*), which is often planted for ornament" (442). Thoreau's description is similar:

... old as the flood, from two to ten to twelve feet in height, their tops flat and spreading, and their foliage blue, and nipped with cold, as if for centuries they had ceased growing upward against the bleak sky, the solid cold. (81)

Both suggest that this species of spruce is not functional within a domestic realm.

than the natural theology-based natural histories he had read to that point. After all, he had begun to collect specimens for Agassiz in the late 1840's and was elected a corresponding member of the Boston Society of Natural History in 1850.

In addition to these scientific names, Thoreau uses some native names in "Ktaadn": "Ktaadn" (2), "Sunkhaze" (7), Pomola (86), etc.⁸³ But this kind of naming does not appear very often because of Thoreau's lack of background in Native American culture and because Louis Neptune (a Penobscot Thoreau and his companions tried to hire as a guide) failed to meet Thoreau and his companions. In fact, the passage in which Thoreau attempts to secure Neptune as a guide is the only passage which gives any thorough discussion of Penobscot mythology of the landscape:

He [Louis Neptune] said, 'Me sure get some moose;' and when I asked if he thought Pomola would let us go up [Ktaadn], he answered that we must plant one bottle of rum on the top; he had planted good many; and when he looked again, the rum was all gone. (11)

Yet since Neptune failed to meet them, Thoreau has no recourse to Penobscot mythology, and the only other reference to Pomola is near the end of the text when Thoreau struggles to name/describe the landscape.

⁸³ Pomola will be discussed more during the ascent section. Pomola is the Penobscot god of Katahdn.

McCauslin can only elaborate on the European American experience in Maine. In the latter two essays, Thoreau has access to native guides, and the enormous number of Penobscot names and definitions become a significant part of the texts.⁸⁴

The previous discussion of Thoreau's method of naming the landscape focuses on the first two-thirds of "Ktaadn." During the first ascent alone, the ascent of the summit and the journey through "Burnt Lands" which comprise the last third of the text, Thoreau's method of description goes through an enormous shift. As Thoreau ascends Katahdin, he struggles to use his previous tropes and metaphors in his descriptions, but as he attempts to use them, he also recognizes that they are inadequate for his experience; thus the text strains to use these tropes yet inevitably their inadequacy becomes the focal point of the description. My analysis at this point will follow the overt quest narrative so as to better focus on the disjunctive qualities later in the text.

When they near the tree line to camp for the evening, Thoreau leaves his companions and "improve[s] the little daylight that was left in climbing the mountain alone" (80). His journey is arduous (read heroic) in that he

⁸⁴ Robert Sayre claims in *Thoreau and the American Indian* (1977) that *The Maine Woods* shows Thoreau intellectual movement from primitivism to a clearer understanding of Penobscot culture.

pulls himself up "by the side of perpendicular falls of twenty or thirty feet, by the roots of firs and birches" and then ascends "huge steps, as it were, a giant's stairway, down which a river flowed" (80). Note how Thoreau emphasizes the heroism of his quest by claiming that the river suggests the stairway of some greater being. Thoreau even compares himself to Milton's Satan:

Leaving this at last, I began to work my way, scarcely less arduous than Satan's anciently through Chaos, up the nearest, though not the highest peak. (80-81)

As he leaves the tree line, Thoreau says of the black spruce he has just crawled through:

Here the principle of vegetation was hard put to it. There was apparently a belt of this kind [black spruce] running quite around the mountain, though, perhaps, nowhere so remarkable as here. (81)

As Thoreau leaves the familiar, the tree line, he acknowledges the distinctions between the deciduous line, the alpine line, and the tree line, something he does not do in "AWW." Thoreau then emphasizes his leaving the familiar in his description of the landscape above the tree line:

... I arrived upon a side-hill, or rather side-mountain, where rocks, gray, silent rocks, were the flocks and herds that pastured, chewing a rocky cud at sunset. They looked at me with hard gray eyes,

without a bleat or a low. (82)

The pastoral metaphor he uses is so forced that Thoreau certainly intends for the reader to see the irony of his description.⁸⁵ Thoreau is not imposing the pastoral on this scene as a way to integrate the familiar into this wilderness (or see congruence in landscape and human meaning); he could have easily written a more sophisticated description if he had intended to do that. Rather, the irony of having "gray, silent rocks" which "chew a rocky cud at sunset" seems so heavy-handed that the description suggests Thoreau's abandoning pastoral descriptions in this landscape. This change is important because his descriptions from this point begin focus more on disjunction than harmony. Thoreau then returns to the camp, and finds that even there the landscape is "a savage and dreary scenery enough; so wildly rough that they looked long to find a level and open space for the tent" (82).

Thoreau never returns to a pastoral description of the mountain; in fact, during his ascent of Katahdin the next day, the mountain top appears as "a vast aggregation of loose rocks, as if some time it had rained rocks ... with

⁸⁵ Few critics acknowledge the irony here. For example, McIntosh says that Thoreau in this scene:

...maintains a cheerful, matter-of-fact tone in his narrative. He still has an appetite for wildness, for new, incommensurable impressions that will feed his imagination. (199)

But the absurdity of the metaphor suggests more tension than McIntosh believes is there.

cavities between, but scarcely any soil or smoother shelf" (84). There is little soil or meadow-like landscape as there would be in a pastoral scene. Thoreau goes on to make a clearer distinction between this landscape and the pastoral:

They were the raw materials of a planet dropped from an unseen quarry, which the vast chemistry of nature would anon work up, or work down, into the smiling and verdant plains and valleys of earth. (84)

The mountain tops may hold the matter on which those pastoral scenes thrive, but mountaintops are not "smiling and verdant." Thoreau has again left his companions behind, but this time leaving does not reflect the same heroic quest as in the previous day's ascent or that described in "AWW." Thoreau continually stresses his solitude in this mountain top scene by drawing attention to the harshness of the landscape and his inability to see very far. He says he "was deep within the hostile ranks of clouds, and all objects were obscured by them" (85). On Katahdin, Thoreau's fear and disorientation cause him to struggle to describe this mountain top with his transcendentalist tropes and metaphors. At one point he adopts urban and industrial similes and metaphors:

It was like sitting in a chimney and waiting for the smoke to blow away. It was, in fact, a cloud factory,--these were the cloud-works, and the wind

turned them off done from the cool, bare rocks. (84-85)

But these are inadequate to emphasize his solitude and removal from the familiar, so he reverts to classical references, saying that the dreariness "reminded me of the creations of the old epic and dramatic poets, of Atlas, Vulcan, the Cyclops, and Prometheus. Such was Caucasus, and the rock where Prometheus was bound" (85). This classical reference is Thoreau's last in "Ktaadn" other than the repetition of "Titanic" used to describe the monumentality of the scene.⁸⁶ This reference differs, though, from those in previous natural histories in that it does not connect this moment to a long tradition and seems patently artificial. It reminds him in general of those "creations," but of no particular one nor of any specific myth.

Thoreau immediately questions Transcendentalism (his ability to discern universal laws in nature) in scenes such as this:

It was vast, Titanic, and such as man never inhabits.

Some part of the beholder, even some vital part, seems

⁸⁶ McIntosh says, "Thoreau's Titanism is a fantasy of self-glorification, of *hubris*. His extreme reaction to the landscape near the summit of Katahdin seems the result of the deflation of his adventurous ambition" (203). This reading does benefit part of my own thesis concerning the frustration of Thoreau's quest motif, yet the Titanism of the mountain suggests more than just the "deflation" of this quest. It suggests a non-sympathetic relation to this landscape.

to escape through the loose grating of his ribs as he ascends. He is more lone than you can imagine. There is less of substantial thought and fair understanding in him than in the plains where men inhabit. His reason is dispersed and shadowy, more thin and subtile, like the air. Vast, Titanic, inhuman Nature has got him at disadvantage, caught him alone, and pilfers him of some of his divine faculty. (85-86)

One can read in this passage the frustration of the narrator in attempting to describe this landscape because as it becomes more inhuman he increasingly loses his capacity for thought and reason. The narrator struggles here for a reference point and adopts again some notion of the gods who might consider it "a slight insult ... to climb and pry into their secrets" (86). But his reference here is not to Greek gods rather Penobscot gods, "Pomola is always angry with those who climb to the summit of Ktaadn" (86). Remember Thoreau's only previous reference to the Penobscot storm-bird god of Katahdin is his somewhat condescending question to Louis Neptune asking whether or not he will let them ascend. But Thoreau has no expertise nor Penobscot guide (as in the latter sections) to extend this description using native mythology, so this reference is dropped. In fact, in the next paragraph the summit scene is anti-climatic because Thoreau struggles for an adequate language. During what should be, in a typical

quest tale, the broad vision and pivotal scene, Thoreau resorts to Jackson's surveys:

According to Jackson, who, in his capacity of geological surveyor of the State, has accurately measured it,--the altitude of Ktaadn is 5300 feet, or a little more than one mile above the level of the sea,--and he adds, 'It is then evidently the highest point in the State of Maine, and is the most abrupt granite mountain in New England.' (86-87)

This forced intrusion of Jackson's mimetic description points out Thoreau's frustration. Mimetic here does not indicate Thoreau's commitment to a scientific point of view as it does his detachment from any particular point of view. If this scene were within his previous transcendental paradigm, it would be the transitional moment of the narrator seeing the universal patterns and a reconciliation between nature and human meaning (as in "AWW"). Instead, he undercuts the narrator's voice by downplaying the view and interjecting statistics. There is no sublime view from Katahdin; there are no descriptions which could give it significance. In addition, the narrative duration of Thoreau's stay on the summit consists of three sentences, for he begins to worry "that my companions would be anxious to reach the river before night" (87).

In what typically would be the denouement of a quest

narrative (the return) comes the moment of crisis.⁸⁷ He has rejoined his companions and is descending with them when they have their first broad view of Maine:

There it was, the State of Maine, which we had seen on the map, but not much like that,--immeasurable forest for the sun to shine on, that eastern *stuff* we hear of in Massachusetts. No clearing, no house. It did not look as if a solitary traveler had cut so much as a walking-stick there. (88)

Now that he finally has a view from the mountain (the broad views he has previously preferred) it is not at all like the view he had from Wachusett. From the summit of Wachusett "... Massachusetts, spread out before like a map" (179-80). Here the wilderness looks nothing like a map because there are no human marks on the landscape. Thus even with this broad view of the lakes and mountains (or wilderness), he cannot designate/name them because there are "... a hundred others [lakes] without a name; and mountains, also, whose names, for the most part, are known only to Indians" (88). This scene suggests a major concern in the latter two sections--that by learning Native names he may better describe the landscape.

This inability to designate by name (a loss of words)

⁸⁷ Tallmadge claims that "Ktaadn" has a typical travel narrative structure, yet this is complicated by a false climax on the summit and the more significant climax during the descent (138-39).

precedes the "Burnt Lands" scene where Thoreau and his companions become lost. The irony of this scene is that it is here, not on the summit, that Thoreau more fully comes to understand the inadequacy of his previous descriptive process (perhaps even the inadequacy of language itself). He says that "perhaps I most fully realized that this was primeval, untamed, and forever untamable Nature, or whatever else men call it, while coming down this part of the mountain" (93). There is a building crisis here, for Thoreau begins to hesitate in his descriptions. He then decides on a name for it, saying:

We were passing over 'Burnt Lands,' burnt by lightning, perchance, though they showed no recent marks of fire, hardly so much as a charred stump, but looked rather like a natural pasture for the moose and deer, exceedingly wild and desolate, with occasional strips of timber crossing them, and low poplars springing up, and patches of blueberries here and there. (93)

Thoreau does introduce a pastoral image here, but he quickly subverts it. His description of the "Burnt Lands" calls them "a natural pasture" not for domesticated animals but for wildlife, and this seems to emphasize the distance between a human interests and this landscape. He claims that he, too, might cross "them familiarly," as though they were "like some pasture run to waste, or partially

reclaimed by man" (93), yet he also realizes that this pastoral view is another imposition because it assumes humanized landscape:

It is difficult to conceive of a region uninhabited by man. We habitually presume his presence and influence everywhere. Here was no man's garden, but the unhandseled globe. It was not lawn, nor pasture, nor mead, nor woodland, nor lea, nor arable, nor wasteland. (93-94)

The word "unhandseled" literally means not to give as a gift. Thus this "globe," where we consistently desire a sign of human intervention and which our very tropes fix toward human ends, is not bestowed upon humans to fulfill our desire. The list that follows covers virtually every imaginable kind of pastoral landscape, repeating for emphasis before each one "nor." Yet Thoreau pushes further in this moment of crisis, questioning not only the naming processes he has used but also questioning how we partition/categorize natural phenomena:

What is it to be admitted to a museum, to see a myriad of particular things, compared with being shown some star's surface, some hard matter in its home! (95)

Note here that the critique hinges on an understanding of the distinction between the closet naturalist and the field naturalist. Closet naturalists classify and neatly place objects in museums, whereas the field naturalist engages

the phenomena in the natural world. Yet Thoreau does not stop his reevaluation here. He critiques even his relation to his own physical body:

I stand in awe of my body, this matter to which I am bound has become strange to me. I fear not spirits, ghosts, of which I am one,--*that* my body might,--but I fear bodies, I tremble to meet them. What is this Titan that has possession of me? Talk of mysteries! Think of our life in nature,--daily to be shown matter, to come in contact with it,--rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the *solid* earth! the *actual* world! the *common sense*! *Contact! Contact! Who* are we? *where* are we? (95)

Significantly, Thoreau subverts the transcendental categories he has previously used to describe the landscape. In this passage there are no patterns behind the contact with the natural world; there are no allegorical signs in nature which speak to our daily life and guide our moral acts. Here these categories have failed. Note, too, that Thoreau struggles with language itself in this passage: the number of exclamation marks, the repetition of words, the smooth narration till now suddenly becomes disjointed and abbreviated, the blunt language of "rocks, trees, wind on our cheeks! the *solid* earth! the *actual* world!" and the questions at the end. Thoreau uses these questions not only to reassert his and

his companions' being lost without an accurate map, but also to foreground an ontological puzzle--"Who are we?" precedes "Where are we?" This passage suggests that Thoreau comes to clearer understanding of the connection between ideology and description. Thus, the more one wishes to accurately describe wilderness the more one must bracket the various ideologies which obscure wilderness. For example, he soon asks the question, "Who shall describe the inexpressible tenderness and immortal life of the grim forest ...?" (108-09). In his answer to this question, he claims:

I am reminded by my journey how exceedingly new this country still is. You have only to travel for a few days into the interior and back parts even of many of the old States, to come to that very America which the Northmen, and Cabot, and Gosnold, and Smith, and Raleigh visited. If Columbus was the first to discover the islands, Americus Vesputius and Cabot, and the Puritans, and we their descendants, have only discovered the shores of America. (109-10)

Thoreau's answer begins with a history of European migration to these shores. Unlike his history which ends "AWW" and attempts to connect the landscape to classical tropes, this history focuses exclusively on this landmass and the unique Anglo history upon it. But this history is not a celebration of Anglo history nor a celebration of

American political boundaries; instead, this is a history of American ignorance of its landscape:

While the republic has already acquired a history world-wide, America is still unsettled and unexplored. Like the English in New Holland, we live only on the shores of a continent even yet, and hardly know where the rivers come from which float our navy. (110)

So where does Thoreau decide to turn for a longer history of and language for this landscape? He concludes this paragraph by saying, "... an Indian is still necessary to guide her scientific men to its headwaters in the Adirondack country" (109-10). In the latter two sections of *The Maine Woods*, Thoreau has Penobscot guides, Joe Aitteon in "Chesuncook" and Joe Polis in "The Allegash and East Branch." These guides become important characters in the sections; in fact Polis virtually dominates the latter. The use of Native language becomes one of the predominant methods of naming from this point on in Thoreau's natural histories because as he realizes the imposition of his previous transcendental tropes, he increasingly adopts Native names in hopes of being more accurate.

As I have stated earlier, I believe Thoreau's encounter with wilderness in "Ktaadn" signaled for him a re-evaluation of his previous philosophy and thereby his naming process; certainly the subsequent changes in his descriptions of landscape point to some kind of change.

But I am unwilling to claim that this scene is the end of Thoreau's transcendentalism because he often laments during his last years that youthful view of patterns and universal laws.⁸⁸ *Walden*, published some six years later (1854), has moments of transcendental description (the allegory of "time is but the stream I go a-fishing in" and the foliate structure of the melting sandbank). His experience on Katahdin, though, caused Thoreau to question the adequacy of language to describe wilderness. This questioning anticipates his later natural histories. While "Ktaadn" doesn't represent Thoreau's most sophisticated (most polyphonous) natural history, it does represent the most significant reevaluation of his previous naming methods.

Before discussing the last two sections, I would like to account for some of the more obvious distinctions between them and Thoreau's previous natural histories. In these sections he overtly uses scientific nomenclature and emphasizes his interest in Penobscot language. As I concluded in the last paragraph, these came about in part because of his reevaluation of transcendentalism and natural theology, but the specific responses (naming processes) were a product of his study in science and Native American culture (particularly Algonquin).

Between 1848 and 1853 Thoreau enthusiastically studied science and taxonomy. In the late forties and early

⁸⁸ See footnote 74.

fifties, Thoreau still borrows heavily from Linnaean artificial classification. As late as 1852, Thoreau still uses Linnaean classification, though at that point it was considered antiquated by most scientists and considered Euro-centric by most American scientists. For example, he states in his journal:

If you would read books on botany, go to the fathers of the science. Read Linnaeus at once, and come down from him as far as you please. It is remarkable how little the mass of those interested in botany are acquainted with Linnaeus. His 'Philosophia Botanica' ... is simpler, more easy to understand, and more comprehensive, than any of the hundred manuals to which it has given birth. (Feb. 17, 1852)

And less than one month later he writes:

I have learned in a shorter time and more accurately the meaning of scientific terms used in botany from a few plates of figures at the end of the 'Philosophia Botanica,' with the names annexed, than a volume of explanations or glossaries could teach This lawgiver of science, this systematizer, this methodist, carries his system into his studies in the field. Into this [botanizing] he introduces law and order and system, and describes with the greatest economy of words what some would have required a small volume to tell (March 12, 1852)

Linnaean classification allows Thoreau to hold onto those transcendental categories which he so often longs for ("law and order and system") as a way to counter the disillusion of the narrower views demanded by the natural system of classification and the polyphony of names (and specialization) that necessarily follow. Again, Thoreau was not in the scientific vanguard; he was not shaping science; his understanding of science reflects the struggles science itself was going through.

One of the most significant changes in Thoreau's background in science is his rejection of Linnaean classification and his acceptance of the natural system of classification. Asa Gray came to Harvard in 1842 (Dupree 110-11) and published *Manual of Botany of Northern United States* in 1848. Thoreau begins using Gray as early as May 18, 1851, but this earliest entry reflects his interest in allegorizing the natural system:

Gray says:--'The organs of plants are of two sorts:--
 1. Those of *Vegetation*, which are concerned in growth,--by which the plant takes in the aerial and earthly matters 2. Those of *Fructation* or *Reproduction*, which are concerned with the propagation of the species.' So it is with the human being. I am concerned first to my *Growth*, intellectually and morally ... and then to bear my *Fruit*, do my *Work*, propagate my kind, not only physically but morally,

not only in body but in mind.

Thoreau's allegorization is problematic. The natural system classification is very difficult to allegorize because it does not allow one to take broad, sweeping views of species and lump them into a divine plan as Linnaean classification does. The Linnaean system suggests that all species are the same as they were on the day of creation. In addition, the specialization of the natural system demands a glossary of names (thus making it difficult to link it to classical tropes). Gray says in his preface to *Manual of Botany*:

An artificial analysis of the Natural Orders or Families, founded on the easier and chiefly external characters, is appended, to aid the learner at the point where he is likely most to need assistance, namely, in referring an unknown plant to its proper order. Every successful attempt, however, will give him new power; and the thorough study, by this system [the natural system], of half a dozen plants of different families will give more knowledge and insight into the science than can be acquired by ascertaining the names (which is nearly all that is done) of a hundred species by means of a facile, thought-saving, artificial classification. (ix)

Even Gray's text is a transitional text which appends a Linnaean chart to aid the "learner" (very common at the

time), but there is no mistaking his claim that the artificial system is "facile" and "thought-saving." Thoreau begins using Gray's botanical names extensively on April 28, 1852.

This switch in classification coincides with Thoreau's increasing disillusionment with science's ability to link him to his transcendental concerns. For example, he states in his journal:

I do not like the name of particular States given to birds and flowers which are found in all equally,--as Maryland yellow-throat, etc., etc. Now for the pretty red capsules or pods of the *Hypericum Canadense*. I fear that my character of knowledge is from year to year becoming more scientific; that, in exchange for views as wide as heaven's scope, I am being narrowed down to the field of the microscope. I see details, not wholes nor the shadow of the whole. I count some parts, and say, 'I know.' (August 19, 1851)

As Thoreau uses more sophisticated science, he begins to understand more clearly the impossibility of keeping those transcendental methods of description. Many critics point to this entry as expressing Thoreau's rejection of science, but, in fact, it represents his increasingly complex view of science. Thoreau does not reject scientific nomenclature at this point in his life, nor does he reject

the natural system and return to the Linnaean; instead, he turns away from the Linnaean system and begins using the natural system. He laments the loss of his previous views and this lamentation becomes a significant part of his later published writings and journal entries. But his natural histories following this time (1851-52) reflect his use of the natural system by the scope of view he uses, his use of scientific nomenclature (technical language), and the polyphony of names that follow, both common and sometimes Native names. Thoreau struggles with this switch; he says of technical terms:

If the sciences are protected from being carried by assault by the mob, by a palisade or *chevaux-de-frise* of technical terms, so also the learned man may sometimes ensconce himself and conceal his little true knowledge behind hard names. Perhaps the value of any statement may be measured by its susceptibility to be expressed in popular language.

(March 2, 1852)

Yet he uses more and more technical language, and in his published texts he does not hesitate to use scientific terms, though he certainly understands his popular audience. Thus when Thoreau critics refer to the seemingly pointless list of names in his later journals and writings, they ignore Thoreau's full participation in the scientific

struggles of his time.⁸⁹

Another interest of Thoreau's which coincides with his background in science is his study of Native Americans. Thoreau began what is called his *Indian Notebooks* in 1847, and they continue until his death. The *Notebooks* are some 2,800 pages of information both from book sources and his personal encounters with Native Americans (particularly Penobscot). Thoreau's interest in Native Americans may derive from his consuming interest in speaking an accurate language of nature. As early as 1842, Thoreau concludes "NHM" by saying that he who is "most scientific will still be the healthiest and friendliest man, and possess a more perfect Indian [Native American] wisdom" (161-62), but I am not claiming that Thoreau's understanding of and interest in Native Americans and their culture did not go through important changes. Robert Sayre in *Thoreau and the American Indians* (1977) claims that Thoreau's understanding of Native Americans began with a sort of blithe primitivism and became less romantic but more sophisticated (158).⁹⁰ After all, in "Ktaadn," he describes one as a "stalwart, but dull and greasy-looking fellow" (10) and their housing

⁸⁹ See Chapter 2 for a fuller discussion of these criticisms.

⁹⁰ Of the three sections of *The Maine Woods*, Sayre says, "They record his progress in breaking through many of the prejudices of savagism to a point where he could present his guides Joe Aitteon and Joe Polis as both Indians and complex, interesting individuals." (xiii)

as having "a very shabby, forlorn, and cheerless look" (6), whereas Joe Aitteon certainly comes across as a respectable and reliable character in "Chesuncckok," and Joe Polis becomes the hero of "The Allegash and East Branch." Yet in *The Maine Woods*, the overwhelming significance of the native guides in the latter sections is that they allow Thoreau access to another language (or naming process), which, as he writes in his journal a few months after his last trip to Maine, might be more accurate:

How little of that arbor-vitae when I have learned only what science can tell me! It is but a word. It is not a tree of *life*. But there are twenty words for the tree and its different parts which the Indian gave, which are not in our botanies, which imply a more practical and vital science. He used it every day. He was well acquainted with its wood, and its bark, and its leaves. No science does more than arrange what knowledge we have of any class of objects. But generally speaking, how much more conversant was the Indian [Polis' brother] with any wild animal or plant than we are, and in his language is implied all that intimacy (March 5, 1858)

Interestingly, Thoreau uses as an example a species which is exclusive to North America, the *Thuja Occidentalis* (or American Arbor-vitae). The point is that Anglos are all the more removed from an accurate description of an object

which is pointedly regional. This passage should not be read as expressing Thoreau's rejection of scientific nomenclature, but as reflecting his knowledge of the inaccuracy of that kind of naming too. As he says later in this same entry:

It was a new light when my guide [Polis] gave me Indian names for things for which I had only scientific ones before. In proportion as I understood the language, I saw from a new point of view. (March 5, 1858)

This passage suggests what I see in Thoreau's later natural histories--an understanding of the connection between ideology, language, and naming. As he learns more about Native language (Penobscot), he sees from another perspective. Note that the language precedes the point of view. A similar perspective on the naming process pervades the later natural histories.

My intent in this examination of Thoreau's historical background in science and study of Native American culture and language during these years (1847-1858) is to foreground my discussion of his naming process in the later two sections of *The Maine Woods* by noting some reasons for the dissimilarity in description. These later sections do not use the same strategy of naming as "Ktaadn" for a number of reasons: the trips themselves are very different --there are no mountain top scenes nor climactic moments as

in "Ktaadn;"⁹¹ the historical contexts I have discussed have drastically reshaped Thoreau's intent in landscape description (naming); and he had access to Penobscot guides.

CHESUNCOOK

This section has neither a clear journey motif nor a quest motif. Thoreau also disengages this text from traditional motifs by focusing far more on the idiosyncracies of the journey (for example, the introduction of specific dates). The only quest is the moose-hunt, yet this rarely takes the foreground. In fact, Thoreau claims later, when he is observing the cleaning of the dead moose, that he "had had enough of moose-hunting" and that he "had not come to the woods for this purpose" (160); thus the focus of "Chesuncook" becomes the descriptions themselves--the Penobscot names, the scientific names, and the local names.

He states early that as they left the streets of Bangor he "began to be exhilarated by the sight of the wild fir and spruce tops ..." because "it was like the sight and odor of cake to a schoolboy" (115). His enthusiasm for the botanical wonders of Maine does not lapse throughout the

⁹¹ For this reason, few critics discuss these later sections. The criticisms of them typically have to do with his contact with native guides, not his description of landscape.

text. This enthusiasm is also apparent in his more mimetic descriptions:

This was an interesting botanical locality for one coming from the South to commence with; for many plants which are rather rare, and one or two which are not found at all, in the eastern part of Massachusetts, grew abundantly between the rails,--as Labrador tea, *Kalmia glauca*, Canada blueberry (which was still in fruit, and a second time in bloom), *Clintonia* and *Linnaea borealis*, which last a lumberer called *moxon*, creeping snowberry, painted trillium, large-flowered bellwort, etc. I fancied that the *Aster radula*, *Diplopappus umbellatus*, *Solidago lanceolatus*, red trumpet-weed, and many others which were conspicuously in bloom on the shore of the lake and on the carry, had a peculiarly wild and primitive look there. (125)

This is representative of Thoreau's later descriptions--he slips in and out of scientific nomenclature and intersperses common names (creeping snowberry, etc.) and local names such as "moxon." What's interesting about this description is his linking of *Clintonia* and *Linnaea borealis*. *Clintonia borealis* is a lily whose eponym is dedicated to De Witt Clinton, who, as I mentioned in Chapter 2, lamented that American birds "were lost under European names." *Linnaea borealis* is a honeysuckle whose

eponym is dedicated to Linnaeus--the person most responsible for American species being lost under European names. Thoreau had to be aware of the significance of these eponyms, which to my mind makes the introduction of the local names all the more ironic.

Not long after Joe Aitteon joins their party as a guide Thoreau comments on Joe Aitteon's careful work on the canoe, "I narrowly watched his motions, and listened attentively to his observations, for we had employed an Indian mainly that I might have an opportunity to study his ways" (128). Thoreau's comment on his observation of the Penobscot guide is important because it immediately signals his interest in this narrative--to watch and "listen attentively." Thoreau's observation is also important because it sets up Thoreau's method of introducing Penobscot names. For example, two pages later Thoreau first uses Penobscot names, writing:

The kingfisher flew before us, the pigeon woodpecker was seen and heard, and nuthatches and chickadees close at hand. Joe said that they called the chickadee *kennilessu* in his language. I will not vouch for the spelling of what possibly was never spelt before, but I pronounced after him till he said it would do. We passed close to a woodcock, which stood perfectly still on the shore, with feathers puffed up, as if sick. This Joe said they called

nipsquecohossus. The kingfisher was *skuscumonsuck*; bear was *wassus*; Indian-devil, *lunxus*; the mountain-ash, *upahsis*. (131)

The progression of names follows a pattern, a common name, then the Penobscot name. Thoreau gives a context for the Penobscot name, then introduces it, usually following this with some kind of etymology (yet by the end of "Chesuncook," when Thoreau is in their camp, this pattern is reversed). Note, too, Thoreau's disclaimer on the spelling of these words, for they derive from an oral tradition; thus the more he can disconnect them from an Anglo imposition and supposedly connect them to phenomena, the more accurate they are.⁹² For example, he later claims:

On entering the lake, where the stream runs southeasterly, and for some time before, we had a view of the mountains about Ktaadn (*Katahdinauquoh* one says they are called), like a cluster of blue fungi of rank growth, apparently twenty-five or thirty miles distant, in a southeast direction, their summits concealed by clouds. Joe called some of them the *Souadneunk* mountains. This is the name of a stream there, which another Indian told us meant 'Running

⁹² This interest in unspoiled Native American lifestyle becomes a more important issue in "The Allegash and East Branch" where Thoreau often deplores Polis' Christian and Anglo ways. Certainly this is a kind of primitivism on Thoreau's part.

between mountains.' (166)

In "Allegash," Thoreau uses Penobscot etymology much more than in "Chesuncook," but his intent is the same in both--to intimately connect the names with the natural phenomena.

But in addition to scientific nomenclature and Penobscot names, Thoreau also uses local (logger) names in "Chesuncook." For example, he says of a type of pine:

At one place we saw a small grove of slender sapling white-pines, the only collection of pines that I saw on this voyage. Here and there, however, was a full-grown, tall, and slender, but defective one, what lumbermen call a *konchus* tree, which they ascertain with their axes, or by the knots. I did not learn whether this word was Indian or English. It reminded me of the Greek word , a conch or shell, and I amused myself with fancying that it might signify the dead sound which the trees yield when struck. All of the rest of the pines had been driven off. (146)

To my mind, this passage shows very clearly Thoreau's growing awareness of the connection between ideology and language. His onomatopoeic pun on "konchus" has to do with the utilitarian perspective of the loggers. By linking "konchus" to the Greek word for shell he also implies that the lumberers see the tree as without spirit, or as a shell and lifeless (unlike Joe Aitteon's preference for animate natural phenomena). So, too, they adopt a word which

sounds like the activity of logging. To further his point, Thoreau says after this description, "How far men go for the material of their houses!" (146). This description is intended to show the inaccuracy of some names. Also Thoreau's critique of logging differs much from his disinterestedness toward this issue in "Ktaadn" and anticipates many of his descriptions in "Allegash," where he clearly argues for restrictions.

Near the end of "Chesuncook," the travelers stop for the night near a lumberers' camp and a Penobscot camp. Thoreau says, "The Indians invited us to lodge with them, but my companions inclined to go to the log camp ... and I preferred to accept the Indian's offer" (180). Yet eventually they all go to the Penobscot camp because it is cleaner than the lumberers' camp, and as Thoreau says, "The most interesting question entertained at the lumberers' camp was, which man could 'handle' any other on the carry; and, for the most part, they possessed no qualities which you could not lay hands on" (181). Of his stay at the Penobscot camp, Thoreau writes:

While lying there listening to the Indians, I amused myself with trying to guess at their gestures, or some proper name introduced. There can be no more startling evidence of their being a distinct and comparatively aboriginal race than to hear this unaltered Indian language, which the white man cannot

speak or understand. We may suspect change or deterioration in almost every other particular but the language which is so wholly unintelligible to us. It took me by surprise, though I had found so many arrow-heads, and convinced me that the Indian was not the invention of historians and poets. It was a purely wild and primitive sound, as much as the barking of a *chickaree*, and I could not understand a syllable of it These were the sounds that issued from the wigwams of this country before Columbus was born I felt that I stood, or rather lay, as near to the primitive man of America, that night, as any of its discoverers ever did. (184-85)

Thoreau's hope is that this language is purer and more intimate understanding of this landscape than any language and history he has previously used. In fact, he even says that it sounds like a *chickaree's* song, suggesting it is as natural. Thus, when Thoreau asks the Penobscots to define more words, the aforementioned pattern is reversed, "*Umbazookskus*, Meadow Stream; *Millinoket*, Place of Islands; *Aboljacarmegus*, Smooth-Ledge Falls (and Dead-Water) ..." (192). Thoreau uses this night as a sort of name-gathering time; the narrative movement of the text almost halts as there are some six pages of names and definitions (186-92).

Thoreau concludes "Chesuncook" on a seemingly contradictory note, saying that "it was a relief to get

back to our smooth, but still varied landscape" (210-11). Thoreau has claimed throughout "Chesuncook" the value of this wilderness and particularly how it has seemed much more accessible to him (not like the Katahdin scene) through a regional Native language. Thoreau is not praising "partially cultivated country" over the landscape in the Maine wilderness. Rather, he sees more clearly the difficulty of his trying to make this wilderness familiar to him. He says later:

Our woods are sylvan, and their inhabitants woodmen and rustics,--that is, *selvaggia*, and the inhabitants are *salvages*. A civilized man, using the word in the ordinary sense, with his ideas and associations, must at length pine there, like a cultivated plant, which clasps its fibres about a crude and undissolved mass of peat. (211)

What Thoreau is suggesting is that he understands more clearly that he cannot spend a few weeks in the woods, listen to a Native guide, and spend a night with his tribe and then accurately name the wilderness. His etymology of "salvages" makes this clear. He notes that the word "sylvan" or wilderness (forest) is in our very name for Natives. They are of the wilderness. He juxtaposes this word with "civilized man," and his pun on the word "pine" is both intended as a natural image--like the tree--and as a longing to live there in the "crude and undissolved mass

of peat." Thoreau follows this with a previously mentioned passage:

The poet's, commonly, is not a logger's path, but a woodman's. The logger and pioneer have preceded him ... and built hearths and humanized Nature for him. But there are spirits of a yet more liberal culture, to whom no simplicity is barren. ... the poet must, from time to time, travel the logger's trail and the Indian's trail, to drink at some new and more bracing fountain ... far in the recesses of the wilderness.

(211-212)

Thoreau admitted earlier that "partially cultivated country" has been the subject matter for "the mass of literature" (211), and he acknowledges that he, too, is relieved to return to that landscape because it is familiar to him. The passage can be read as simply pointing to a need for wilderness in the poet's experience (which is most often pastoral), but the claim is not merely for the poet to leave for wilderness. It is also for the poet to walk the "trails" of the logger and the Indian, to know the unwritten parts of American history.

"Chesuncook" describes Thoreau's first direct encounter with a Native in the wilderness; in the guide and in his language Thoreau sees another naming process which

he attempts to incorporate into his own text.⁹³ While the naming processes in this section look forward to those of "The Allegash and the East Branch," they do not show the complexity or narrative duration of his descriptions in the later section. But again, "Chesuncook" was derived from a trip in 1853. Thoreau was by no means as sophisticated a scientist or ethnologist (though it might be a stretch to call Thoreau an ethnologist at all) as he was in 1857, when he returned to Maine.

THE ALLEGASH AND EAST BRANCH

As the focus of "Chesuncook" becomes the descriptions themselves, the focus of "The Allegash and East Branch" seems to be the relationship between Thoreau and the party's guide, Joe Polis. "The Allegash and East Branch" was not completed during Thoreau's life. He was making some editorial notes during the last months of his life, but he gave no clear indication as to how he wanted the text to be structured. Ellery Channing and Sophia Thoreau made final editorial changes before its publication in *The Maine Woods*. With this in mind, my discussion of "The Allegash and the East Branch" will be truncated because any criticism of this text as a natural history must focus on

⁹³ The conclusion of "Chesuncook," though, shows a Thoreau ill at ease with his own ability to name this wilderness: an issue which anticipates the bioregionality of his last four natural histories.

the individual descriptions, not the overall structure.

Thoreau never developed a close relationship with Joe Aitteon and only speaks at length of Penobscot custom and language during the final pages of "Chesuncook" (while at the "Indian camp"). In "Allegash," though, Thoreau virtually hounds Polis for names and answers to his questions, and he makes detailed notes of Polis' ways (even those which Thoreau considers to be Anglo in origin like his Christianity). If there emerges a hero at all in "Allegash," it is Polis, not Thoreau. This is not to say that the naming processes of the wilderness become diminished by Thoreau's forwarding Polis' hero status; rather, through their relationship and Thoreau's admiration for Polis the naming process has a longer narrative duration because Thoreau is filtering the information through a number of different labels: Polis' language and its definitions, scientific language, and common names. Gone, though, are Thoreau's numerous classical references, his preference for broad, distant views, and the insistence on finding universal patterns.⁹⁴

Early on, Thoreau states his purpose for the trip:

I observed that I should like to go to school to him

⁹⁴ For example, he has one classical reference in all of "Allegash," yet this reference is nothing like those in "Ktaadn." He says of Polis' description of his up-coming walk to Oldtown: "It reminded me of Prometheus Bound. Here was traveling of the old heroic kind over the unaltered face of nature" (322).

to learn his language, living on the Indian island the while; could not that be done? 'Oh yer,' he replied, 'good many do so.' I asked how long he thought it would take. He said one week. I told him that in this voyage I would tell him all I knew, and he should tell me all he knew, to which he readily agreed.

(229)

Thoreau is using hyperbole here: how could he learn the Penobscot language in one week and how could they disseminate all of their knowledge to each other in seven days? As Mary Sherwood says, "Of course there is some exaggeration here, on both sides: the Indian was either too impressed by Thoreau's facility with words, or he put the then usual Indian interpretation of time on the measure of one week" (3-4). But far-fetched claims aside, the intent is clear: Thoreau is on this trip to observe and learn all he can from Polis. This is not to suggest that Thoreau avoids his previous methods of naming (such as scientific nomenclature), but that they are balanced against those names which Polis gives him. For example, Thoreau says:

There grew the beaked hazel, the only hazel which I saw on this journey, the *Diervilla*, rue [sic] seven feet high, which was very abundant on all the lake and river shores, and *Cornus stolonifera*, as red osier, whose bark, the Indian said, was good to smoke, and was called *maquoxigill*, 'tobacco before white people

came to this country, Indian tobacco.' (232)

Note how the description progresses from common name to scientific name to Indian name. Then this Indian name is connected to a pre-colonial history and use. This kind of heteroglossia typifies the method of descriptions in "Allegash." Yet Thoreau also adopts some of Polis' terms and uses them exclusively (e.g. Thoreau adopts the term *musquash* after saying, "Just before night we saw a *musquash* (he did not say muskrat), ... (282)

Perhaps the most significant scene in "Allegash" is Thoreau's description of the phosphorescent wood. I will not say that there is a climactic scene in this text because I hesitate to argue that "Allegash" has an overall structure; yet the scene does have a high point in these journal entries. The scene begins with Thoreau "getting up some time after midnight" while his companions "were sound asleep" (245). He begins:

I observed, partly in the fire, which had ceased to blaze, a perfectly regular elliptical ring of light, about five inches in its shortest diameter, six or seven in its longer, and from one eighth to one quarter of an inch wide. It was fully bright as the fire, but not reddish or scarlet, like a coal, but a white and slumbering light, like the glow-worm's.
(245)

Thoreau's narrative starts with a blunt description. His

simile at the end of this passage connecting the "light" to "glow-worm's" suggests some liberty (the light is "slumbering") in his otherwise objective description, but his scientific voice immediately returns:

I could tell it from the fire only by its whiteness. I saw at once that it must be phosphorescent wood, which I had so often heard of, but never chanced to see. Putting my finger on it, with a little hesitation, I found that it was a piece of dead moose-wood (*Acer striatum*) which the Indian had cut off in a slanting direction the evening before. (245)

Thoreau's description now connects the phenomena to a particular name--"phosphorescent wood." But Thoreau does not stop there; he investigates the type of tree from which the limb came. Interestingly, Thoreau uses the name *Acer striatum* or striped maple (or moose wood) instead of the preferred name in Gray's *Manual of Botany*, *Acer Pennsylvanicum*. The latter is the Linnaean name, and the former is Lamarckian. While this might account for part of Thoreau's decision to use *Acer striatum* (to avoid Linnaean nomenclature), it doesn't seem a very good reason because Gray himself uses the Linnaean name. A better reason is that Thoreau is avoiding those names which would draw attention away from the species and to political boundaries.

After a long discussion of his inspecting some

phosphorous chips which he extracted with his knife, Thoreau ends his description of that night. The next paragraph begins:

The next day the Indian told me their name for this light,--Artoosoqu',--and on my inquiring of the will-o'-the-wisp, and the like phenomena, he said that his 'folks' sometimes saw fires passing along various heights, even as high as trees, and making a noise.
(246-47)

Note Thoreau's progression: he has observed the phenomenon; inspected it closely; given it a name (both a common name and a scientific one); and now corroborates the phenomenon with Polis and gives the Penobscot with some contextual commentary. Thoreau then continues with a commentary on his perspective concerning the phenomenon:

I was in just the right frame of mind to see something wonderful, and this was a phenomenon adequate to my circumstances and expectation, and it put me on the alert to see the more like it. I exulted like 'a pagan suckled in a creed' that had never been worn at all, but was bran new, and adequate to the occasion.
(247)

Again, Thoreau's awareness of the connection between ideology and observation here is obvious. His perception was ready for the phenomenon--ready to see the object, even in this case when it is seemingly fantastic. And then he

says the phosphorescent wood was "adequate to my circumstances and expectation"; his method of labeling is unlike a scientific labeling (perspective) which looks for causes. Here he has been able to suspend his scientific perspective. Remember, though, this description began with a very systematic observation of the light and then proceeded to a scientific name for the limb. So while Thoreau begins to stress how he has suspended his scientific observation, this suspension does not reflect his labeling method at the beginning (here being more dialogic). As Thoreau suspends this scientific observation, he comments on what is gained:

I let science slide, and rejoiced in that light as if it had been a fellow-creature. I saw that it was excellent and was very glad to know that it was so cheap. A scientific *explanation*, as it is called, would have been altogether out of place there. That is for pale daylight. Science with its retorts would have put me to sleep; it was the opportunity to be ignorant that I improved. (247)

What is gained is ignorance. But it is an ignorance which observes phenomena as though the phenomena are fellow creatures. Thoreau is not saying they are fellow creatures but "as if." The distinction is important because Thoreau is examining perspective, not rejecting science out of hand. Thoreau is emphasizing the relativity and the

particular disadvantage of a scientific perspective (a sort of quantitative rather qualitative bracketing); thus he concludes this description, saying:

Long enough I had heard of irrelevant things; now at length I was glad to make acquaintance with the light that dwells in rotten wood. Where is all your knowledge gone to? It evaporates completely, for it has no depth. (248)

The "irrelevant things" to which Thoreau is referring are those same specifics which he so diligently gave the reader earlier; what Thoreau struggles with in this description is that that kind of labeling is not adequate, is not accurate. Thus, after incorporating the Penobscot name and folklore, Thoreau is able to set aside scientific observation and see from another perspective (reminiscent of the journal entry earlier):

It was a new light when my guide [Polis] gave me Indian names for things for which I had only scientific ones before. In proportion as I understood the language, I saw from a new point of view. (March 5, 1858)

Note, though, that Thoreau does not deify the phosphorescent wood as he deified landscape in previous natural histories.⁹⁵ In the end he says that he "was glad

⁹⁵ He does refer to the woods as "choke-full of honest spirits as good as myself any day" (248), but this animation of nature is more a result of his attempt at

to make acquaintance with the light that dwells in rotten wood": not universal patterns, nor ahistorical laws; just "light," "rotten wood," and making an "acquaintance."

In this heteroglossic description of the phosphorescent wood, the more mature method of Thoreau's later natural histories emerges. He is less comfortable with one means of labeling, and thus adopts others in order to reconfigure his perspective toward the natural object. Unfortunately, critics generally ignore such descriptions because they suggest a text without unified form, or by somewhat tortuous logic they argue for a unity amidst the polyphony of voices. What is of greater value for contemporary readers is acknowledging that the description suggests Thoreau's struggles with naming: his awareness of the ideological restrictions that necessarily are a product of adopting a particular voice, and his retrospection in these various voices by adopting new ones.

The Maine Woods is a difficult text to discuss as a single book because Thoreau neither compiled the three essays nor completed revisions on "Allegash." In addition, these essays span over half of Thoreau's active writing years (1846-1857). These are enormously important years, considering his intellectual questionings of science, Transcendentalism, and technology, his encounter with

adopting a Penobscot perspective, rather than harking back to natural theology.

wilderness, and his study of Native American cultures. The intent in this chapter has been to take into account these various factors in the drastic transformations of Thoreau's means of naming the landscape. When viewed historically these three sections show a Thoreau who before Ktaadn relies on his transcendental tropes and metaphors and who after Ktaadn struggles to find accurate labels. It would be a misreading to suggest that Thoreau turns only to Penobscot language as a means to name the wilderness, for the latter two texts have as many scientific names as they do Native names. More appropriate would be to say that these later two texts begin to show the heterogenous quality of his later natural histories and thus his increasing awareness of the inaccuracy of language.

Chapter V

The Wildness of Naming, Primitive Senses, and the Contingency of Subjectivity

How much of beauty--of color, as well as form--on which our eyes daily rest goes unperceived by us! No one but a botanist is likely to distinguish nicely the shades of green with which the open surface of the earth is clothed,--not even a landscape-painter if he does not know the species of sedges and grasses which paint it. (Aug. 1, 1860, Thoreau's *Journal*)

What, then, is [sic] explanation of the apparently tireless energy that directed his activity? Is it not found in the transcendental doctrine that sees the macrocosm reflected in the microcosm? He seems to have thought that if he could succeed in learning all that there was to be known about the natural objects under his scrutiny, he must eventually discover the lurking place of God. (Hicks, *The Development of the Natural History in American Literature*)

"... though, if I were to live, I should have much to report on Natural History generally." (Thoreau, letter to Myron Benton, March 21, 1862)

Thoreau's last natural histories were published between 1860 and 1862. These comprise the last natural histories which Thoreau had time to revise for publication before his death in May, 1862.⁹⁶ "The Succession of Forest Trees" was first published in the *New York Tribune*, Oct. 6,

⁹⁶ Two of these essays, "The Succession of Forest Trees" and "Autumnal Tints," Thoreau intended to be part of a larger project. Recently Bradley Dean has edited Thoreau's journals and compiled a book titled *The Dispersion of Seeds* (1993) which Robert Richardson hails as "the first new book of Thoreau's to appear in one hundred twenty five years" (Richardson, "Introduction" 3). Yet William Howarth suggests there is "a good deal of hyperbole" in this claim because some of this material has been published before and because the text:

... consists largely of passages Thoreau copied from his journal and natural history lectures, arranged in a topical order with the addition of much undigested matter: repetitions, long quotations, news clippings, statistics. (12-13)

Because of the scholarly difficulties/dangers of using this edited text I will not refer to it in this dissertation.

1860; "Walking," "Autumnal Tints," and "Wild Apples" were published consecutively in *Atlantic Monthly* in June, October, and November, 1862 (*The New Thoreau Handbook* 58-62). These texts represent the later Thoreau in terms of what I consider his mature natural history writing.

"Walking" and "Wild Apples" have achieved some popularity among Thoreau readers and scholars, but "The Succession of Forest Trees" and "Autumnal Tints" have received little attention. The reason for this lack of attention is that most Thoreau scholars feel the need to compare "Walking" and "Wild Apples" with his larger works and do not focus on the vast changes in Thoreau's concerns. After all, since most readers discuss "Walking"'s declarations about the West as a traditional nineteenth-century American journey narrative, they often ignore other issues in the essay. "Wild Apples" is considerably less discussed than "Walking," and even when it is discussed, critics often focus only on its rhetorically strategic emulations of biblical prophetic voices (read ministerial).⁹⁷ Also, until the mid-sixties, many scholars have felt the need to attribute these essays to Thoreau's supposed waning abilities as a *belletristic* writer. To my mind, these essays are most valuable not in their

⁹⁷ See Steven Fink's "The Language of Prophecy: Thoreau's 'Wild Apples' and Kevin Van Anglen's "A Paradise Regained: Thoreau's *Wild Apples* and the Myth of the American Adam."

similarity to *A Week* or *Walden* but because they contrast with his early concerns and methodologies, particularly in the struggle of naming (which are relatively minor sections in *A Week* and *Walden*).

In the epigraphs that begin this chapter, I quote Philip Hicks asking, "What, then, is [sic] explanation of the apparently tireless energy that directed his activity?" (71). Hicks suggests that the answer lies in Thoreau's desire to learn "all there was to be known about natural objects under his scrutiny" because then "... he must eventually discover the lurking place of God" (71). But near the end of his life Thoreau did not so blithely believe in his ability to "... discover the lurking place of God." Certainly Katahdn had taught him that the sublime moment (nearing "the lurking place of God") is not as pleasant as he once thought. But this doesn't really address the larger issue that concerns Hicks. What concerns Hicks is that the appearance of all these scientific, common, and native names is a seemingly random list. As I have claimed, I believe that this can be accounted for by Thoreau's interest in naming: how the names of things are determined (the contingency of subjectivity), how those names affect us (the user of names and thus the contingency of perception), and whether the names of things can give us a more accurate understanding of the natural phenomena (can the word and object return to

an original unity?).⁹⁸ As Thoreau considers more carefully Emerson's claim for a "fossil poetry," he sees that a language that could best account for American landscape would hinge on a historical view of language that would know the broad, various histories of perceptions and would seek to derive from a peeling away of the historical impositions a more accurate name/word. In his journal in 1859, Thoreau says:

Talk about our *letters* and being *literate*! Why, the roots of *letters* are *things*. Natural objects and phenomena are the original symbols or types which express our thoughts and feelings, and yet American scholars, having little or no root in the soil, commonly strive with all their might to confine themselves to the imported symbols alone. All the true growth and experience, the living speech, they would fain reject as 'Americanisms.' It is an old error, which the church, the state, the school ever commit, choosing darkness rather than light, holding fast to the old and to tradition. A more intimate

⁹⁸ Robert Sattlemeyer says of this idea of language: Thoreau's contribution to this theory [transcendental language] was to take it seriously and literally as a principle of his style, and consequently we find one of his most characteristic stylistic devices to be the often surprising reattachment of a word to its original sense (77 Sattlemeyer, *Thoreau's Reading*)

Michael West's series of articles addresses this issue most carefully.

knowledge, a deeper experience, will surely originate a word. (Oct. 16, 1859)

Thoreau's claim here is the motivating factor of his last natural histories. These essays reflect Thoreau's distrust of current names (as in the above passage) for of various reasons: their Euro-centric history, a utilitarian perspective of the natural object, their supposed scientific objectivity (Baconianism). Thoreau's process of naming, then, takes on a new urgency in his desire for an accurate name as he narrows his focus to the local, to scientific description and nomenclature, and to immediate or personal contact with the phenomena. These essays, unlike his previous natural histories, begin to turn on themselves and meditate on the naming process and the problem of perception.⁹⁹ This focus on the naming process suggests a Thoreau ill at ease with his own naming and the labels he has used. Thus his later essays suggest a complexity and layering of narrative roles unlike his early natural histories.

"THE SUCCESSION OF FOREST TREES"

Thoreau delivered "The Succession of Forest Trees" as an address to the Middlesex Agricultural Society in

⁹⁹ While "The Succession of Forest Trees" does not reflect this questioning of perception as overtly as the latter three essays do, it does show Thoreau's concern with establishing his authority by field experience (field naturalist), not by taxonomy (closet naturalist).

September, 1860 (*The New Thoreau* 58). Although some have argued that this essay is clearly a scientific piece, Thoreau intended it for a local, agricultural audience. These audiences, agricultural and scientific, were not as at odds with the sciences as some twentieth-century agrarians are.¹⁰⁰ Thoreau defines the topic of "SFT" in response to a question asked of him:

... I have often been asked, as many of you have been, if I could tell how it happened, that when a pine wood was cut down an oak one commonly sprang up, and vice versa. To which I have answered, and now answer, that I can tell,--that it is no mystery to me. (227)

The issue is how trees that are not common to one type of forest spring up if that forest is cut down: spontaneous generation vs. the dispersion of seeds. Most at this time believed this new growth was an example of God's compensatory act of causing a differing species to grow in areas where it did not before.¹⁰¹ But few other than those who worked or studied in rural landscape gave much thought

¹⁰⁰ I need to reiterate here that there was little division between applied science and pure science (generally meaning specialization) during this time. Although specialization was becoming more prominent, it had not become the dominant method of scientific study. See Chapter 2 for a longer discussion.

¹⁰¹ See Chapter 2 for a longer discussion. In addition, Bradley Dean's "Henry D. Thoreau and Horace Greeley Exchange Letters on the 'Spontaneous Generation of Plants'" provides a clear picture of this issue by printing some of the letters Thoreau and Greeley wrote on this issue. These letters were written between 1860 and 1861.

to this issue. His topic, then, demands a particular kind of audience: one that knows what is at issue and one that would benefit from a scientific answer. Thoreau chooses this audience for two reasons. First his audience is familiar to him, is local, and knows something of the landscape and issue at hand. As Thoreau says, "I wish to see once more those old familiar faces whose names I do not know, which for me represent the Middlesex country" (225), and who "... come as near being indigenous to the soil as a white man can ..." (225). Second, this audience has a vested interest in the topic; in other words, this new species of forest will determine the kind of lumber they may harvest. Later he claims:

She [Nature] is all the while planting the oaks amid the pines without our knowledge, and at last, instead of government officers, we send a party of wood-choppers to cut down the pines, and so rescue an oak forest, at which we wonder as if it had dropped from the skies. (238)

Thoreau's audience also determines one of his conceits in the text--his play on "patent" and "patient." Thoreau certainly knew of the farmers' keen interest in seeds, and their knowledge of patents on various hybrids of seeds, so his use of "patent" recognizes the commodity interest of his audience and the government interest, yet he undercuts this commodification by pointing out that the dispersion of

seeds is a method that Nature "long ago made patent to all" (238). His pun on "patient" is intended to emphasize nature's slow dispersion and the careful method of observation it takes to observe this process which "English planters have discovered by patient experiment" (237). Remember that horticulture, in particular, was never clearly "'Americanized[,] for its existence depended upon a transatlantic exchange'" (Charlotte Porter 21). Interestingly, the majority of Thoreau's sources on horticulture in "SFT" are English, not American. His rather non-nationalistic use of European sources is at odds with other later natural histories, in which he is vehement about distinguishing American names from European sources and names. His avoidance of this issue has to do with a clear understanding of his audience and their concerns, which do not involve nationalism but increasing production.

Thoreau also establishes a sympathetic voice in "SFT." He knows that he is not the typical speaker at such a meeting and thus spends much of the first three pages establishing his authority.¹⁰² In the first sentence he says, "Every man is entitled to come to Cattleshow, even a transcendentalist; and for my part I am more interested in the men than in the cattle" (225). His point here is

¹⁰² This authority is important for his claim (and method of naming) because implicit in Thoreau's essay is an ecological undercurrent which stresses the importance of sustainable forestry practices which allow for the dispersion of seeds to take place.

important because his audience knows of him and the transcendentalists (there was a public distrust of their eccentric ways).¹⁰³ Thoreau quickly tries to win them over by a humorous introduction which stresses the diversity at the cattleshow, later claiming, "It is true, there are some queer specimens of humanity attracted to our festival, but all are welcome" (225). But rather than claiming his authority on their good will, Thoreau also establishes his authority by emphasizing his credentials as a surveyor and as a naturalist:

Moreover, taking a surveyor's and a naturalist's liberty, I have been in the habit of going across your lots much oftener than is usual, as many of you, perhaps to your sorrow, are aware. I have several times shown the proprietor the shortest way out of his wood-lot. (226)

What Thoreau wants his audience to believe is that he knows their woods better than they know their woods--that he knows it as a surveyor and as a naturalist. He says:

Therefore, it would seem that I have some title to speak to you to-day; and considering what that title is, and the occasion that has called together, I need offer no apology if I invite your attention, for the few moments that are allotted me, to a purely

¹⁰³ Harding in *The Days of Henry Thoreau* claims throughout that the general public was wary of the high-mindedness of the transcendentalists.

scientific subject. (227)

By "a purely scientific subject" Thoreau means a topic that this audience would not associate with transcendentalism but that they would grant him authority because his experiential and technical background. Thoreau consistently reemphasizes how these people have most often encountered him; he even concludes the introduction to the argument by telling his audience, "Let me lead you back into your wood-lots again" (227) where he knows the landscape (both the literal landscape and the landscape of the scientific explanation) better than they do.

Since Thoreau intends to downplay his transcendentalism because this audience would not grant him authority based on transcendentalism, he must use another method of labeling/description. He begins the essay by creating a space for himself as a transcendentalist at a cattleshaw because "all are welcome," but he then establishes his authority based on his knowledge and on his close, patient observation of the landscape. His explanation would seem to undercut a neo-classical natural theology-based view of the universe because of its denial of spontaneous generation, yet he tries to reinscribe a natural theology based on the idea that seed dispersion is as suggestive of a universal system as spontaneous generation. He claims, "There is a patent-office at the seat of the universe, whose managers are as much interested

in the dispersion of seeds as anybody at Washington can be ... " (228). Joan Burbick argues that:

'The Succession of Forest Trees' begins with an apologia for the transcendentalist as scientist, then blends the two identities, and ends by dissociating them altogether. It is at once a vindication of the methods of observation that Thoreau has developed and a final assertion that the transcendentalist also sees redemptive design within the laws of the material universe. (126)

Certainly Thoreau wants his method of observation and his transcendentalism to meld together cleanly, but Thoreau's conceit of patents and universal laws suggests an irony in his metaphors for universal patterns.¹⁰⁴ The essay does not end with a claim that this union is easily achieved or that the audience itself will recognize it if it is achieved. Instead, it ends with lamentation about people loving "darkness rather than light." The essay does not reflect the more overt struggles of naming that the other three natural histories do; this narrower focus on natural

¹⁰⁴ Burbick continues:

Implicit in Thoreau's positing separate seeds for the imagination and the material universe is the possibility of separate systems for the two realms, precisely what he was trying to avoid by his vision of uncivil history. By the end of the essay, however, the synthesis of natural causes and of imaginative associations appears impossible. (Burbick 129-30)

My point is that this synthesis is never clearly conceived of by Thoreau because of his strained metaphors.

phenomena does not allow Thoreau naming strategies similar to his earliest three natural histories of that region.

The stylistic changes from his previous natural histories of the local landscape are evident in his citing outside sources (scientific authority), using scientific names, and narrowing the focus in his descriptions. Particular to this essay, this narrower, "more scientific" focus partly accounts for his use of the term "patient" describing the method of observation and for his use of the term "patent" describing those universal laws behind the dispersion.

"SFT" includes references to or direct quotations from Alexander Milne (an English botanist), John Loudon (one of those arguing for a natural classification system), William Bartram (an eighteenth-century American naturalist), George B. Emerson (one of the writers of the Reports which Thoreau reviewed in "NHM"), Dr. William B. Carpenter (author of *Vegetable Physiology*), and Charles T. Jackson (his source of much information during his Maine trips), all botanists. Some of these authorities are directly quoted at length; Milne receives nearly a full page quotation in "SFT" on the advantage of planting oaks amid more established pines that the English horticulturists have used for a long time. Loudon, Bartram, Emerson also are directly quoted. Yet Thoreau does not allow these authorities to dominate his text. Thoreau affirms after Milne's long quotation that

these scientists are unwitting followers of nature, that "... they appear not to have discovered that it was discovered before, and that they are merely adopting the method of Nature" (237-38). After quoting Loudon's claim that the best method to preserve a seed is to place it in a "rotheap," Thoreau says, "Here, again, he is stealing Nature's 'thunder'" (241). These authorities are in the text not only to give scientific background to Thoreau's claim but also to reiterate nature's observable method.

Thoreau first uses scientific labels in "SFT" to name those species that help disperse seeds (such as the common wood-mouse which interestingly should be called the deer mouse) or *Mus leucopus*¹⁰⁵ and the striped squirrel or *S.*

¹⁰⁵ Another indication of the utilitarian view of nature at the time is Thoreau's earliest recognition of *Mus Leucopus* which he ascertains on March 9, 1855, using Audubon and Bachman's *Quadrupeds of America*. Of this species they say:

We do not regard this species as doing very extensive injury either to the garden or farm, in any of the Atlantic States of America. We suspect that its reputation in this respect, as well as that of the shrew-mole, has been made to suffer very unjustly, when in reality the author of the mischief is the little pine-mouse, (*Arvicola pinetorum*, Le Conte), or perhaps Wilson's meadow-mouse, *Arvicola Pennsylvanica*, Ord, *A. hirsutus*, Emmons, and DeKay). The farmers and gardeners of the Northern and Eastern States, however, complain that this Mouse, which they generally call the "Deer-mouse," destroys many of their cabbage-plants and other young and tender vegetables, and gnaws the bark from the young fruit trees; and if they have made no mistake in regard to the species, it must be much more destructive than we have heretofore considered it. (305)

This utilitarian view of a species typified natural histories at the time. Later in this chapter, I examine a journal entry in which Thoreau brings up the issue of

Tamias. Of the latter, Thoreau furthers his argument using the scientific label:

How commonly in the fall you see the cheek-pouches of the striped squirrel distended by a quantity of nuts! This species gets its scientific name, *Tamias*, or the steward, from its habit of storing up nuts and other seeds. (243)

Thoreau certainly uses the scientific label as a means of giving his text a scientific authority, but the etymology also suggests that the very name of the animal reflects its observable actions.

The scientific labels of plants are generally limited to his discussion of searching the ground of the old Winthrop house's cellar. His reason for using scientific labels here is that he finds plant species not common to the area; thus his readers are probably not familiar with them. Thoreau lists them as:

... a species of nettle (*Urtica urens*) which I had not found before; dill, which I had not seen growing spontaneously; the Jerusalem oak (*Chenopodium botrys*), which I had seen wild in but one place; black night shade (*Solanum nigrum*) which is quite rare hereabouts, and common tobacco, which, though it was often cultivated here in the last century, has for fifty years been an unknown plant in this town (247-

utilitarian views of nature.

48)

Certainly his audience would not be accustomed to using scientific names in conversation about these species, so it seems probable that Thoreau uses these scientific names to point out his expertise in labeling uncommon species. Thoreau also uses one other scientific name for a plant, the "*Poitrine jaune grosse*" (249). This name refers to the "large yellow squash" he grew from the seeds sent to him by the Patent Office, but Thoreau uses the name in a rhetorically different fashion than he used previous scientific names. This passage will be discussed later.

"SFT" also differs from previous natural histories in its narrow and sustained focus on a particular natural phenomenon (what I have said earlier Thoreau calls "patient" observation). In the early natural histories, Thoreau preferred a broad scope to his descriptions, and the quest motif superseded the descriptions because the anticipated spiritual renewal of the narrator became the focal point of the text. In the later natural histories (even "Walking"), the descriptions/naming of nature becomes the focal point; thus the action on the part of the narrator becomes a kind of experiential data-collecting (one more means of labeling) and because this kind of observation demands a more sustained view it lengthens the narrative duration of the descriptions of specific phenomena (a more mimetic quality). For example, Thoreau's

description of how some seeds are "winged" and others are "legged" extends some two-and-a-half pages (229-31). This point is important for Thoreau because he can easily account for the dispersion of pine seeds which are carried by air, but he must also account for the dispersion of "heavy seeds and nuts which are not furnished with wings" (229). He does so by focusing first on how cherry seeds of varying species are dispersed by birds, pointing out not only that the birds can carry them afar, but that the seed of the cherry is "in the very midst of a tempting pericarp, so that the creature that would devour this must commonly take the stone also into its mouth or bill" (230). Thoreau then expands on his observations about this method of dispersion by pointing out another mode of transportation:

Some wild men and children instinctively swallow these, as the birds do when in a hurry, it being the shortest way to get rid of them. Thus, though these seeds are not provided with vegetable wings, Nature has impelled the thrush tribe to take them into their bills ... and they are winged in another sense, and more effectually than the seeds of pines, for these are carried even against the wind. (230-31)

He certainly intends for his audience to recognize the humor of the description, but more importantly Thoreau's description holds a particularly narrow focus on this topic, and this topic is only preparatory to his overall

purpose in "SFT." A by-product of these longer, more narrow descriptions of natural phenomena is the change in Thoreau's use of the first person narrative. In "SFT," he uses first person narrative differently in that his actions are not the focal point of the narrative but his personal observations mark a specific kind of experiential evidence. Remember that Thoreau carefully situated himself at the beginning of "SFT" as an authority of the local landscape who knows the woodlots of the local farmers better than the farmers do. He must authenticate this authority with careful, personal observation because his rhetoric demands it. Thoreau begins the longest section of first person observation by claiming:

I confirmed this [that there is a rotation between pine and oak forests] many years ago, and an occasional examination of dense pine woods confirmed me in my opinion. It has long been known to observers that squirrels bury nuts in the ground, but I am not aware that anyone has accounted for the regular succession of forests. (233)

Thoreau follows this claim by giving specific dates of his observations, by counting the seeds left in the nests (even the size of the nests) of squirrels and mice, and the specific distances between similar species of trees (233-241). Of course, Thoreau says of these observations, "I confess I was surprised to find my theory so perfectly

proved in this case" (235). This kind of observation on Thoreau's part marks his more overt use of the field naturalist tradition. The field naturalist of the 1850's typically saw that species (here the succession of species of trees) were in flux and that the role of the closet naturalist as mere classifier ignored the environmental forces which determine the kind and interaction of species in a given locale.

As Thoreau concludes "SFT" he returns to a metaphor which he established earlier--seeds are regularly dispersed by the "patent office" of nature. He states early in the essay:

There is a patent-office at the seat of the universe, whose managers are as much interested in the dispersion of seeds as anybody at Washington can be, and their operations are infinitely more extensive and regular. (228)

Again, Thoreau knew of his audience's knowledge of patents, so his use of "patent-office" is intended to speak to his audience's background, yet introduce a transcendental use of this idea of "patent." For as regularly as the farmers depend on the government for seeds, so, too, can they depend on nature to create new forests by its own method of dispersion. In the concluding section of "SFT," Thoreau states:

Though I do not believe that a plant will spring up

where no seed has been, I have great faith in a seed--
 a, to me, equally mysterious origin for it. Convince
 that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to
 expect wonders. I shall believe that the millennium
 is at hand, and that the reign of justice is about to
 commence, when the Patent Office, or Government,
 begins to distribute, and the people to plant, the
 seeds of those things. (248)

Thoreau hopes to re-instill a universality/theology in this new theory of tree succession. He bases this theology on the notion that the seed holds enormous possibilities and thus suggestions of universal laws--just as much as spontaneous generation can claim miraculous acts.¹⁰⁶ But Thoreau's metaphor suggests a not so peaceful investment of transcendentalism into his essay, for inherent in his metaphor is a commodity-based ideology. In other words, Thoreau understands how this metaphor might speak to this particular audience, but the metaphor itself strains to encompass the universal as "patent-offices," which dole out

¹⁰⁶

Robert Sattlemeyer claims that:

Here, having just taken pains to disprove the popular fallacies about the generation of plants and to prove that they spring from seeds, Thoreau suddenly shifts the level of his argument to imply that the seed is not only related to mature fruit by material cause and effect but is perhaps an organic principle in itself of yet another order. (xxv "Introduction")

But this shift is not as sudden as Sattlemeyer suggests, for Thoreau's conceit of the patent-office would certainly show his audience early on in the lecture that he was doing more than disproving spontaneous generation.

seeds to those who pay for a specific product and want specific returns or marketable products; the metaphor cannot adequately account for nature's more "mysterious origin."¹⁰⁷ He tries to divest his metaphor of this ideology by ironically pointing out that if the government starts distributing "the seeds of those things," then he will believe the "millennium is at hand." What Thoreau means by "the seeds of those things" is an acceptance of wonder and universal laws, but this irony is immediately undercut by Thoreau's example in his story of the large yellow squash. The "*Poitrine jaune grosse*" which he received from the Patent Office produces enormously. As he

¹⁰⁷ Thoreau recognizes the problem of commodification, government involvement, and natural history, as he did not in "NHM." In a journal entry written during the same time he was gathering notes for "SFT," he states:

We are not chiefly interested in birds and insects, for example, as they are ornamental to the earth and cheering to man, but we spare the lives of the former only on the condition that they eat more grubs than they do cherries, and the only account of the insects which the State encourages is of the 'Insects Injurious to Vegetation.' Massachusetts has published her report on 'Insects Injurious to Vegetation,' and our neighbor the 'Noxious Insects of New York.' We have attended to the evil and said nothing of the good. This is looking a gift horse in the mouth with a vengeance. Science is inhuman. Things seen with a microscope begin to be insignificant. So described, they are as monstrous as if they should be magnified a thousand diameters. With our prying instruments we disturb the balance and harmony of nature. (May 1, 1859)

Many critics have used the last section of this passage "Science is inhuman" to claim that Thoreau is rejecting science, but a more careful reading suggests that he is responding to limits that an applied or commodity-based science necessitates.

says, "A little mysterious hoeing and manuring was all the *abracadabra presto-change* that I used, and lo! true to the label, they found for me 310 pounds of *poitrine jaune grosse* there ..." (249). Thoreau wants his audience to believe that though nature and its ways may be presented as facts this should not devalue any sense of universal quality and wonder. Thus, he pokes fun at the idea that the squash succeeded so well through typical methods of good farming. But the story here is not about non-human nature. His final example to win his audience over to a more spiritual view of nature comes from a familiar source to them (agricultural), but the source is a product of human intervention. Thoreau is fully aware of the distinctness of this example from the observations of the majority of the essay. Thus, Thoreau himself concludes the essay on a sobering rather than a high note:

You have but little more to do than throw up your cap for entertainment these American days. Perfect alchemists I keep who can transmute substances without end, and thus the corner of my garden is an inexhaustible treasure-chest. Here you can dig, not gold, but the value which gold merely represents; and there is no Signor Blitz about it. Yet farmers' sons will stare by the hour to see a juggler draw ribbons from his throat, though he tells them it is all deception. Surely, men love darkness rather than

light. (249-50)

What Thoreau's conclusion suggests is not a reconciliation with his audience. In fact, he seems to condemn their interests and their inability to grasp his link between fact and mystery. They would rather see magic and "deception" than engage in the patient observation needed to discern truth and universal law. Thus for as much time and effort as Thoreau has put into creating a sympathetic voice for his audience, he ends by suggesting that they will not understand his claims.

But Thoreau's essay also suggests an uneasiness on his part. Thoreau's struggle in "SFT" is to develop a method of description in which he can relay facts yet still maintain mystery and wonder. The result of this essay is a method of observation which depends far more on the American field naturalist tradition--a method of observation that is focused, narrow, personal, and detailed--than on the closet naturalist tradition--a method of observation which is mostly concerned with recognition and classification. However, Thoreau's desire to find the universal typically implies another method of observation--one that is sweeping, broad, and looks for repetitions. Because of this dilemma, Thoreau's natural histories begin to turn inward on observation/naming itself. In "The Allegash" and "SFT," Thoreau notes that the preparation of the observer determines what one sees: for example, the

phosphorescent wood scene and his claim that if there is a seed then he "is prepared to expect wonders" (248). In the subsequent natural histories, large sections are devoted to the process of observation/naming as Thoreau more clearly understands that contingencies of subjectivity and perception (what he has called "preparation") determine the actual method of observation and descriptions of nature.¹⁰⁸

"WALKING"

Thoreau delivered "Walking" as a series of lectures during the years 1851 through 1857. By the later lectures, he had divided the material into two different orations, but for publication had combined the material again; it was published in *Atlantic* in June, 1862 (*The New Thoreau* 60). The essay has three main approaches through which Thoreau addresses the central concern: how we relate to the natural world. These approaches are walking as a meditation on and mediation of the natural world (very different than the quest motif of his early natural histories in that it becomes a self-conscious reflection of the quest motif and

¹⁰⁸ James McIntosh claims that "SFT" examines: ... not the vitality of human involvement with (as in 'Walking') nor the human ability to conceive of beauty in the presence of natural phenomena (as in 'Autumnal Tints'), but the existence and power of Nature-as-a-living-whole as she expresses herself in laws and growth, *kosmos* and *phusis*. (294)

While "SFT" lacks the introspection of the later natural histories, McIntosh sweeps over the inherent problems of metaphor and observation in the essay.

walking), the wild as the non-humanized phenomenal world (very different than his pastoralized landscapes of the early natural histories), and the contingency of naming and the subjectivity of perception (these will be discussed at length later). In these last two approaches, Thoreau struggles to maintain cohesion in his text. James McIntosh has said that:

'Walking' is in part a declaration of independence in which Thoreau paradoxically proves his orthodoxy: he defies the world and sticks to his original naturalist-Emersonian faith. (McIntosh 285)

But such a reading does not account for the numerous etymologies and the narrative layering in Thoreau's descriptions which question "his original naturalist-Emersonian faith" as just one more imposition. As he continually peels away the historical (particularly European) impositions on the human relationship with nature, his method of description becomes increasingly introspective and he begins focusing not only on the object but also on the subjectivity of perception.

Walking

Thoreau commences "Walking" by clearly delineating his purpose in the essay. He begins:

I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute freedom and wildness, as contrasted with a freedom and

culture merely, civil,--to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of Nature, rather than a member of society. I wish to make an extreme statement, if so I may make an emphatic one, for there are enough champions of civilization, the minister and every one of you will take care of that. (251)

Note the intentional reference to Emerson's "Nature" by regarding humans as "a part and parcel of Nature." But Emerson's claim is that he becomes "part and particle of God" in the transcendental moment. Thoreau's intent here in "Walking" is not the same as Emerson's. Emerson's claim is for a loss of ego--to become a "particle" of God; Thoreau, on the other hand, uses the term "parcel" which typically means a distinct but essential part of something. This distinction is important because Thoreau recognizes subjectivity as an essential part of walking, wildness, and naming. Thoreau also distances himself from the ministerial role/voice that is a "champion of civilization," the ministerial voice which in his early natural histories he had used to align himself with popular natural history writers (most of whom wrote within neo-classical natural theology).

Thoreau's next paragraph begins with an etymology of walking itself. He says that he has met only a couple of people

... who understood the art of Walking, that is, of

taking walks,--who had a genius, so to speak, for sauntering: which word is beautifully derived 'from idle people who roved about the country, in the Middle Ages, and asked charity, under the pretense of going a *la Sainte Terre*,' to the Holy Land, till the children exclaimed, 'There goes a *Sainte-Terrer*,' a Saunterer, a Holy-lander. (251)

Thoreau's definition shows a change in the narrative perspective he assumes. Instead of clearly using a quest motif, he examines the history of what this motif may mean. He, then, says in the essay that

Some, however, would derive the word from *sans terre*, without land or a home, which, therefore, in the good sense, will mean, having no particular home, but equally at home everywhere. (252)

This etymology is in direct opposition to the former. As the first saunterer has a destination, the latter has none. Thoreau is exploring the derivations as a way of achieving a clearer definition of what he means by "walking." He later claims that he prefers "the first, which, indeed, is the most probable derivation" because "every walk is a sort of crusade" (252). But the etymology has already suggested to the reader that Thoreau is not blithely or unconsciously accepting the "chivalric and heroic spirit which once belonged to the Rider [or Knight], though this spirit "seems now to reside in, or perchance to have subsided

into, the Walker ..." (253). Yet Thoreau's is a "Walker, Errant" (253). What Thoreau wants to engender in the reader is a respect for the enterprise of walking, not, though, for the quest motif, for what Thoreau values in walking is not the destination, not the attainment of a goal, but the retrospect of one's self in non-human nature (the meditation). As he later says, some of the townspeople have told him of their walks "in which they were so blessed as to lose themselves for half an hour in the woods; but I know very well that they have confined themselves to the highway ever since ..." (254). Not the common act of walking, but by the losing of themselves are they blessed.

Thoreau continues his definition by pointing out walking's value as physical exercise. He points out how mechanics and shopkeepers must sit cross-legged all day and jokingly concludes that "they deserve some credit for not having all committed suicide long ago" (255). So, too, he wonders "How womankind, who are confined to the house still more than men, stand it" and decides that "most of them do not *stand* it at all" (256), that they take to sleeping during the day as a means of alleviating the boredom. But Thoreau distinguishes what he considers the point of walking, from the point of exercise, saying that "the walking of which I speak has nothing in it akin to taking exercise ... but is itself the enterprise and adventure of

the day," (256-57) and that one "must walk like a camel which is said to be the only beast which ruminates when it walks" (257). What Thoreau is arguing is that "walking" is a re-configuration of one's civil self by the absence of those civil situations which determine our actions (whether it be one's employment or for women--social constructions which determine what we may do). The rumination which he says is a part of walking is the process by which one examines these social conditions. As he says later, "In my afternoon walk I would fain forget all my morning occupations and my obligations to society" (258), but the method by which one must do that is by enumerating them/ruminating over them. He himself has participated in a similar activity in his extensive etymology and definition of walking.

Wildness

After describing what he means by walking, Thoreau claims that, "When we walk, we naturally go to the fields and woods ..." (258). He makes the claim for two reasons: first, that he must leave humanized landscape, and second, that there is "subtle magnetism" which draws him into wilderness.

First, as I claimed in the previous paragraph, walking in nature supposedly allows one to re-configure one's self without the constant sensory reminders of social

obligation. Thoreau says that he, himself, sometimes "cannot easily shake the village. The thought of some work will run in my head and I am not where my body is,--I am out of my senses" (258-59). The actual landscape determines a particular response on his part. Thus the seemingly least humanized nature (read wilderness) will be the best for walking. For this reason, Thoreau continues in the next few pages to define a landscape in which he can walk, where he "can easily walk ten, fifteen, twenty, any number of miles, commencing at my own door, without going by any house..." (260). He points to those places where he cannot "walk": near fields, churches, schools, trade and commerce, meaning, of course, civilized landscape. He says of the word village that

The word is from the Latin *villa*, which together with *via*, a way, or more anciently *ved* and *vella*, Varo derives from *veho*, to carry, because the villa is the place to and from which things are carried. They who got their living by teaming were said *vellaturam facere*. Hence, too, the Latin word *vilis* and our vile; also *villain*. This suggests what kind of degeneracy villagers are liable to. They are wayworn by the travel that goes by and over them, without traveling themselves. (261)

It would be too easy to suggest that Thoreau is rejecting urban society as evil in a Wordsworthian pastoral critique;

instead, this passage shows that Thoreau examines the negative possibilities in pastoral villages. His etymology is intended to show that we as speakers of the language use these terms commonly in ways that inform Thoreau's claim.

Second, Thoreau contends there is "a subtle magnetism in Nature, which, if we yield to it, will direct us aright" (265). This seemingly most transcendental (an intuition which allows one to discern universal laws in nature) of claims, though, signals a distinct change in the text. For as Thoreau's walk or rumination in the narrative of the text leads him away from the historical impositions of American writing at the time (to the "West"), so, too, does it allow him space to critique the descriptions of American landscape. Earlier, he claims:

I walk out into a Nature such as the old prophets and poets, Menu, Moses, Homer, Chaucer, walked in. You may name it America, but it is not America; neither Americus Vespucius, nor Columbus, nor the rest were the discoverers of it. There is a truer account of it in mythology than in any history of America, so called, that I have seen. (262)

Such a claim harks back to his early natural histories, where he assumes the role of these classical and European writers. His "account" of this landscape is better expressed in mythology than in the regional and local histories. But this methodology is not reflected in other

sections in "Walking" in which he rejects these classical and European tropes and styles. As Thoreau ruminates more on this issue/walks more "westward," he claims, "We go eastward to realize history and study the works of art and literature, retracing the steps of the race; we go westward as into the future, as with a spirit of enterprise and adventure" (267). Dividing East and West becomes for Thoreau a way of segregating those historical impositions which determine our social life (the east) from that landscape which seemingly allows re-configuration (the west). But Thoreau goes farther in this claim, bringing up Buffon and the issue of species degeneration (an issue long since dismissed by most professional scientists, but still important for Americans in nationalistic terms). He quotes Sir Francis Head:

'The heavens of America appear infinitely higher, the sky is bluer, the air fresher, the cold is intenser, the moon looks larger, the stars are brighter, the thunder is louder, the lightning is vivider, the wind is stronger, the rain is heavier, the mountains are higher, the rivers longer, the forests bigger, the plains broader.' (271)

He then follows this saying, "This statement will do at least to set against Buffon's account of this part of the world and its productions" (271). By "productions," Thoreau specifically means those species in American

landscape which Buffon had called degenerative forms of European species, but Thoreau makes clear that he means our intellectual products by imitating the previous description of the landscape:

I trust that we shall be more imaginative, that our thoughts will be clearer, fresher, and more ethereal, as our sky,--our understanding more comprehensive and broader, like our plains,--our intellect generally on a grander scale, like our thunder and lightning, our rivers and mountains and forests (273)

Thoreau then begins to reject classical and European tropes for looking back, not forward. He says, "It is too late to be studying Hebrew; it is more important to understand even the slang of to-day" (273). He bases this rejection on his insistence that Americans must focus on their own landscape and look to "the west," but Thoreau quickly makes the point that "The West of which I speak is but another name for the Wild; and what I have been preparing to say is, that in Wildness is the preservation of the World" (275). As I claimed in Chapter 2, Thoreau's oft-quoted phrase here is multi-faceted. The phrase creates both a space of freedom in which sensory data (phenomenal wilderness) seemingly does not configure the perceiver into her typical social roles and a frame of mind (rumination) which allows retrospect and critique of historical impositions. From this space of "wildness," Thoreau claims of European

writing:

English literature, from the days of the minstrels to the Lake Poets,--Chaucer and Spenser and Milton, and even Shakespeare, included,--breathes no quite fresh, and in this sense, wild strain. It is an essentially tame and civilized literature, reflecting Greece and Rome. Her wilderness is a greenwood, her wild man a Robin Hood. There is plenty of genial love of Nature, but not so much of Nature herself. (283-84)

This rejection of eastern tropes and literatures is intended to liberate an American literature just as the walker is freed to re-configure self. But there is, of course, an inherent contradiction in this claim for an American (wild) literature--how can one create a literature when the previous methods are thrown out? How can we describe nature at all when previous methods are rejected as inaccurate? For this reason, "Walking" turns on itself, questioning the naming process itself.

Meditation on Naming

In the first instance of Thoreau's questioning the naming process itself, he asks:

Where is the literature which gives expression to Nature? He would be a poet who could impress the winds and streams into his service, to speak for him; who nailed words to their primitive senses, as farmers

drive down stakes in the spring, which the frost has heaved; who derived his words as often as he used them,--transplanted them to his page with earth adhering to their roots (284)

Thoreau's quest for a wild literature depends upon the idea that the word (label) suggest a directness to the object--that the author can fix words to their original meanings by gleaning away all of the historical impositions, and can continually "derive" labels in their "primitive sense" as often as she uses them. But Thoreau struggles with such a project. The first sentence of this passage is framed as a question. In the following paragraph, he says, "I do not know of any poetry to quote which adequately expresses this yearning for the Wild. Approached from this side, the best poetry is tame" (284). This section arrives at what is perhaps the central focus of this dissertation and is at the heart of Thoreau's conflict in naming: if one is willing to grant a moment of "wildness" or re-configuration of self outside culture, then the contingency of subjectivity and perception can not speak/write an adequate language (a language in which natural object and word are immediate, intimate, and adequate) to name nature because the namer is constantly in a state of flux, of searching etymological roots, of peeling away historical impositions. In the Introduction, I claimed that Thoreau seeks to create himself as both neutral nomenclator and mimetic

participant. Thoreau's interest in being a mimetic speaker is apparent in his awareness that differing cultural roles (farmer, scientist, Native American) will demand and create differing labels for natural phenomena. Thus Thoreau assumes a multiplicity of narrative roles to account for this contingency of the subject speaker. Thoreau's interest in being a neutral nomenclator is apparent in his awareness that the "preparation" or frame of mind in which the observer views natural phenomena affects not only the actual scope of view but what objects will be discerned. Thus Thoreau's awareness of the contingency of perception accounts for his layering of multiple narrative roles. The labels for objects (which are always cultural because they are linguistic) can only represent the object in that the namer presuppose how the labels are not like the object. The perceiver/observer of natural phenomena can only claim an accurate perception when she must also admit that she "prepared" herself to see such things (not a new idea for Thoreau).¹⁰⁹ This kind of perspectivalism suggests that

¹⁰⁹ Perhaps William Rossi's claim that "Walking" participates in a kind of Coleridgian polarity comes closest to my own reading. He states:

The form it [Coleridgian polarity] takes is especially successful in the way it represents, at the center of self-culture, an ineluctable and disturbing tension between the double sense of 'actual' limitation and ideal promise, the tension in which the walker's life 'consists.' (105)

But Rossi's thesis does not allow for the heteroglossic tendencies in the essay's structure by which Thoreau's early descriptions hark back to transcendental moments.

each perspective (or "preparation") may potentially represent a truth about the object, but these perceptions are true only as they continually contrasted and displaced.

Thoreau's use of names hereafter is much more sensitive than in his previous natural histories. He says, "When looking over a list of men's names in a foreign language, as of military officers, or of authors who have written on a particular subject, I am reminded once more that there is nothing in a name" (289). In fact, the only names which he is willing to extend any significance are Native American names. He claims that he has been told that "an Indian had no name given him at first, but earned it, and his name was his fame; and among some tribes he acquired a new name with every exploit" (290). The respect to which he grants this naming method is that it is contingent. It is malleable and changeable, but Thoreau does not claim that it is accurate.

For this reason, Thoreau contends that the most approximate language is a "*Gramatica parda*" or "tawny grammar" (293)--literally meaning a "soiled language" both because it "has soil attached to its roots" and because it is imperfect and contingent. This idea is intimately connected to his notion of the contingency of perception. Immediately following this section, Thoreau says:

We have heard of a Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge. It is said that knowledge is power; and

the like. Methinks there is equal need for a Society for the Diffusion of Useful Ignorance, what we will call Beautiful Knowledge, a knowledge useful in a higher sense: for what is most of our boasted so-called knowledge but a conceit that we know something, which robs us of the advantage of actual ignorance?

(293)

Of course, Thoreau's pun here is on utilitarianism, which pervaded the science of his day. But Thoreau is questioning not only that aspect of Baconianism, but also the Baconianism he argues for in "Natural History of Massachusetts," in which observation leads one to infer universal laws.¹¹⁰ Here Thoreau favors an approach which

¹¹⁰ Robert Sattlemeyer says of this section: The wild is a reminder of the original attachment to the sources of life, and points back to a time and a state where nature and man's consciousness were not separate entities, and where nature was not an object to be learned and mastered for the sake of material knowledge and power. Hence, Thoreau's proposal, at once earnest and ironic, for a 'Society for the Diffusion of Useful Ignorance,' for he argues that it is only when we become wise enough to forget that we 'know' nature that we can participate in what he calls 'Beautiful Knowledge.' The historical result of increasing knowledge in the scientific sense has been an increased separation and loss of harmony between man and nature, a loss, as Thoreau points out, that can be demonstrated by history and language itself....

(xxiii-xxiv Sattlemeyer, "Introduction")

This passage reflects Sattlemeyer's romanticism more than Thoreau's. To my mind, while Thoreau desires an "original attachment" he is not hopeful that such an "ignorance" will lead the reader back to that supposed historical moment. Rather, Thoreau's claims for ignorance seem an acknowledgement of our limitations (not just science but cultural impositions) to retrieve that "original attachment."

disavows "conceits" because they tell more about ignorance than they do of "universal" knowledge (note, too, that this clarifies the struggle with his conceit in "SFT"). He says later:

The highest we can attain to is not Knowledge, but Sympathy with Intelligence. I do not know that this higher knowledge amounts to anything more definite than a novel and grand surprise of a revelation of the insufficiency of all that we called Knowledge before (294)

This "Sympathy with Intelligence" is often read as Thoreau's use of a transcendental view of nature in which his imagination corresponds to natural phenomena, but Thoreau uses the term "sympathy," not "empathy" which would suggest more correspondence. This passage seems to discuss what this sympathy cannot do rather than what it can, but this in itself is a freeing moment. For as one codifies the various historical perspectives as inaccurate and begins to layer them, then the focus is not so much on "conceits" as it is on differentiation and heteroglossia, not so much on a universal perception as on the act of perceiving the perception.

"Walking" concludes by stressing the importance of living "in the present" (301). His point is that "it is an expression of the health and soundness of Nature ... to celebrate this last instance of time" (302). Again, this

is a method in which the perceiver attempts to strip away the historical impositions which deny her access to re-configuration.¹¹¹ The importance of "Walking" is that in the essay he confronts the major issue which has increasingly pervaded his descriptions: the desire to strip away historical and cultural impediments from the namer by etymologies and doubling perceptions which necessarily also strips the namer of an adequate language. Thus while "Walking" does not appear to have the heteroglossic qualities of "Autumnal Tints" and "Wild Apples" (the subsections of the essay, the various labels for each object) it certainly exhibits narrative layering in that it is a natural history of the naming process itself. This question becomes less the focal point of the last two essays and more a necessary part according to Thoreau's natural history/naming process because these last two focus on specific natural phenomena; therefore, the turn of naming is but one narrative layer which recognizes the contingency of a subjective label and perspective.

¹¹¹ Similarly Max Oelschlaeger says:
Walking is a path to freedom, an organic activity that redirects humankind's attention to the natural, organic, and essential. Thoreau's insight is astute, however imperfect the idea of 'wildness' might be in conveying the essential notion that *cultural forms*, just as inorganic and organic ones, must evolve in response to changing circumstance. (165)

"AUTUMNAL TINTS"

"Autumnal Tints" was given as a lecture as early as 1859 and is taken from journal entries dated from 1851 to 1858 (*The New Thoreau* 61). The essay can be seen as the response to Thoreau's query in "Walking," "Where is the literature which gives expression to Nature"? He says of the impetus for "AT":

I formerly thought that it would be worth the while to get a specimen leaf from each changing tree, shrub, and herbaceous plant, when it had acquired its brightest characteristic color, in its transition from the green to the brown state, outline it, and copy its color exactly, with paint, in a book, which should be entitled, 'October, or Autumnal Tints;'--beginning with the earliest reddening.... (307-08)

This impetus is important because again Thoreau desires an organic text which would be "exactly" like the object. But the breadth and precision which he contends it must have--that it have a "specimen from each changing tree, shrub, and herbaceous plant" and that it paint its changing "color[s] exactly--make such a project impossible. Thus Thoreau continues:

What a memento such a book would be! You would need only to turn over its leaves to take a ramble through the autumn woods whenever you pleased. Or if I could preserve the leaves themselves, unfaded, it would be

better still. I have made but little progress toward such a book, but I have endeavored, instead, to describe these bright tints in the order in which they present themselves. (307-08)

His point is that if such a book existed it would be nature itself, and Thoreau admits that he has "made but little progress toward such a book." In admitting the limitations of his text, Thoreau gives the focal point of "AT." Since "AT" is not the organic text he early described, Thoreau says he will instead "describe those bright tints in the order they present themselves."¹¹² Thoreau's emphasis on color and perception is at the center of "AT"--what Thoreau later calls the "intention of the eye" (352) or the contingency of perception. Thoreau's purpose is to describe the changing "tints" of autumn in Massachusetts. Thoreau struggles with the indefiniteness of "tints" by narrowly focusing on discrete objects, thus the introduction of subsections by species and the proliferation of scientific labels. But these labels are continually displaced by common names or etymologies that strip the label of its classificatory power. Thoreau

¹¹² His hope here is that by following a seasonal pattern his text will also participate in a more natural form. This is certainly a return to his notions of form in the early natural histories and *Walden*, but "AT" differs from those texts in that it focuses on a single season, and instead of consistently reiterating the "natural form" of the essay, Thoreau's subsections (specific sections by names of trees) turn the reader's attention away from the form to the discrete phenomena.

strips these labels of their classificatory power so as to show the restrictions that each label brings with it. What "AT" must discuss--in fact the conclusion of the essay turns to this very issue--is the subjectivity and perception which puts into question the method by which the observer of nature perceives or the "preparation" for observation. Preparatory to this discussion of perception, Thoreau uses strategies of narrative layering similar to those in "Chesuncook" and "Walking," though certainly more pronounced: a nationalistic departure from European literature and nomenclature; the heteroglossic use of scientific labels, common names, and local or indigenous names (in "AT" this is much more apparent in his use and inevitable departure from scientific labels); and the turning on naming itself at the end.

Nationalism

In the first sentences he marks his departure from a Euro-centric nature history by making an extravagant claim for American landscape:

Europeans coming to America are surprised by the brilliancy of our autumnal foliage. There is no account of such a phenomenon in English poetry, because the trees acquire but few bright colors there.

(305)

Just as in "Walking," Thoreau claims in "AT" that European

literature is inadequate to describe our landscape because the European landscape itself is inferior. Thoreau's response is an indirect rebuttal to Buffon and those European natural historians who saw American landscape not only as an inferior form of European landscape but who also used European labels to designate distinct New World species (I will discuss the section of "AT" where Thoreau discusses this issue directly later). While the former may just be poor science, the latter is analogous to the problem American writers saw at this time that there was no American literature; European words have designated our physical landscape and literal landscape. Thoreau comments later:

To walk amid these upright, branching casks of purple wine [Poke berries], which retain and diffuse a sunset glow, tasting each one with your eye, instead of counting the pipes on a London dock, what a privilege! Our poets have sung of wine, the product of a foreign plant commonly they never saw, as if our own plants had no juice in them more than the singers.

(312)

The complaint is not only that American poets sing of European wine but that they sing of a wine "they never saw." Thoreau continually hinges the production of an American literature on the sensory experience of American landscape, for he believes that as the poet perceives the

unique qualities of this landscape, then the poet's literature will possess originality. He continues:

Indeed, this has been called by some the American Grape, and, though, a native of America, its juices in are used some foreign countries to improve the color of the wine; so that the poetaster may be celebrating the virtues of the Poke without knowing it. I could spend the evening of the year musing amid the Poke-stems. And perchance amid these groves might arise at last a new school of philosophy or poetry.

(312-13)

He calls the European writer a "poetaster" both because he is European and because he celebrates the wine without knowing the actual ingredients within it. Thus any "new school of philosophy or poetry" must come from confronting this landscape directly (even with all the contingency of subjectivity and perception). Thoreau's distancing of American literature from its European history pervades "AT"--not only in these more overt ways but also in his critique of foreign labels and replacement of them with local and common names.

Labels

Thoreau uses scientific labels and description generously in "AT." He uses them as a way to narrow his scope and designate the discrete and specific. For

example, "AT" is divided into subsections by the sequence of autumnal colors. The subsections consist of: THE PURPLE GRASSES, THE RED MAPLE, THE ELM, FALLEN LEAVES, THE SUGAR-MAPLE, and THE SCARLET OAK. This methodology allows him not only to observe and label the species botanically, but also to designate specific parts of each plant. Thoreau begins "AT" admitting that he can only describe "tints," but using the specificity of scientific observation allows him to temper the relativism of his perceptions.¹¹³ Yet, as is typical of the late natural histories, this more technical language is consistently countered by either transcendental descriptions or by what Thoreau believes is his greater concern: the problem of perceiving of these tints. In the former, Thoreau seemingly negates scientific labeling and explanation by transcendental desire; in the

¹¹³ Joan Burbick claims, "Naming color helps unite the range of color perception with a stable system of signifiers" (132). I am in agreement with this assessment of Thoreau's intent in using scientific language. The question that arises, though, is how then do we read his rejections of this same "stable system." Burbick continues:

In 'Autumnal Tints,' the grid of species' names becomes a sorting processor by which the observer collects discrete observations and experiences beauty and moral value. The poet always goes beyond the grid to questions of wider value, but without the grid he or she is lost in the labyrinth of subjectivity. (134)

She assumes that Thoreau is melding these narrative processes (methods of naming) much more easily than I see that he does. What seems more apparent to me is the conflict between these roles. Viewing these roles in conflict more fully accounts for the inevitable turning on naming itself that typifies Thoreau's later natural histories because from this conflict arises a frustration with inaccuracy, not ease.

latter, science is set aside as just one more type of perception--no better or worse than others. Science in this view helps designate some particulars but necessarily glosses over others.¹¹⁴

An excellent example of his scientific labeling is the discussion of a particular genus of grasses:

... near the end of August ... Andropogons, or Beard-Grasses, is in its prime: *Andropogon furcatus*, Forked Beard-Grass, or call it Purple-Fingered Grass; *Andropogon scoparius*, Purple Wood-Grass; and *Andropogon* (now called *Sorghum*) *nutans*, Indian-Grass.

(313)

He continues by giving the specific size and shape of each of these species, where he has found them, and the kind of soil they prefer. Yet Thoreau does not stop at this description; he later says, "Wherever I walk these afternoons, the Purple-Fingered Grass also stands like a guide-board, and points my thoughts to more poetic paths than they have lately traveled" (315). Note that he uses

¹¹⁴ Hildebidle claims:

Science and the scientist are continually present in each essay, and continually accurate, so far as Thoreau knows, and so far as any second-hand account can, in his view of things, be accurate. But one would at least have to say that this is a more meditative kind of science than is common in traditional natural history writing before Thoreau. What concerns Thoreau in the end is not a fact but how it corresponds to a condition of the observer; it is our response to a fact that is central, and too often inadequate. (91)

the common name in order to introduce his simile. His method of observation contradicts his method of observation in the previous passage. What is important is that Thoreau moves in and out of these labeling methods--juxtaposing or sometimes downright subverting one for the other.

Thoreau's use of science, though, is not limited to nomenclature; it also allows him to see more specifically. For example, he says of the "Poke or Garget (*Phytolacca decandra*)" (311):

Every part is flower (or fruit), such is its superfluity of color,--stem, branch, peduncle, pedicel, petiole, and even the at length yellowish purple-veined leaves. Its cylindrical racemes of berries of various hues, from green to dark purple, six or seven inches long, are gracefully drooping on all sides, offering repasts to the birds; and even the sepals from which the birds have picked the berries are a brilliant lake-red, with crimson flame-like reflections Hence, the *lacca*, from *lac*, lake.

(311)

Thoreau's etymology of *lacca* is taken directly from Gray's *Manual of Botany*. Gray says, "Name compounded of , plant, and the French *lac*, in allusion to the coloring matter resembling that pigment which the berries yield" (385). Thoreau's etymology, though, unlike Gray's, leads him to consider the metaphor of fluid further. He says the

redness of the Poke "... speaks to our blood" (311) and later claims, "What a perfect maturity it arrives at! It is the emblem of a successful life concluded by a death not premature, which is an ornament to Nature" (312). Again, Thoreau counters his highly mimetic description with a transcendental view in which nature becomes an "emblem" for humanity. In addition, this passage immediately precedes his nationalistic claims about Poke berry wine and American literature.

But transcendentalism is not the only way in which Thoreau counters scientific explanation. Thoreau also plays upon the limitation of a scientific view. He says early on in the essay:

The physiologist says it [the coloring in autumn leaves] is 'due to an increased absorption of oxygen.' That is the scientific account of the matter,--only a reassurance of the fact. But I am more interested in the rosy cheek than I am to know what particular diet the maiden fed on. (306)

The "rosy cheek" here does not suggest a transcendental perspective; the "rosy cheek" is a "tint," and Thoreau's negation of a scientific explanation is based on narrowness of concern and perception. But this differing perspective is not similar to the transcendental rejections in which scientific perspective and labeling pose a more serious threat to a broader scope. In addition, there are sections

in "AT" where Thoreau's etymologies merely poke fun at the scientific label:

It [the red maple leaf] flashes out conspicuous with all the virtue and beauty of a Maple,--*Acer rubrum*. We may now read its title, or *rubric*, clear. Its virtues, not its sins, are as scarlet. (319-20)

His etymological pun here is clearly playful without pretensions of a grander, more symbolic scheme; whereas, his etymology of *Phytolacca decandra* is not intended to be playful. In fact, such playfulness suggests Thoreau's more sensitive awareness of the inaccuracy of language (of the gap between signifier and signified) because here he cannot even construct an emblem--as the words themselves become "clear" as having no connection to "virtue" or "sin" in the red (unreadable) maple, for these are human manufacturings.

Thoreau also explores the more common names with which we refer to autumnal colors. He says:

Shall the names of so many of our colors continue to be derived from those of obscure foreign localities, Naples yellow, Prussian blue, raw Sienna, burnt Umber, Gamboge?--(surely the Tyrian purple must have faded by this time),--or from the comparatively trivial articles of commerce,--chocolate, lemon, coffee, cinnamon, claret?--(shall we compare our hickory to a lemon, or a lemon to a hickory?)--or from ores and oxides which few see? Shall we so often, when

describing to our neighbors the color of something we have seen, refer them, not to some natural object in our neighborhood, but perchance to a bit of earth fetched from the other side of the planet, which possibly they may find at the apothecary's, but which probably neither they nor we ever saw? (335-36)

His critique here is straightforward: these names for colors we commonly use are derived from foreign perceptions and foreign landscape. By foreign perceptions I mean a culture and language which is spoken elsewhere and are representative of a different landscape. By foreign landscape I mean that the perceptions were of a non-American landscape--that they have no connection to the actual phenomena within the actual American landscape.

Thus Thoreau continues:

Leave these precious words to cabinet keepers, virtuosos, and maids-of-honor,--to the Nabobs, Begums, and Chobdars of Hindostan, or wherever else. I do not see why, since America and her autumn woods have been discovered, our leaves should not compete with the precious stones in giving names to colors; and, indeed, I believe that in the course of time the names of some of our trees and shrubs, as well, as flowers, will get into our popular chromatic nomenclature. (335-36)

What Thoreau suggests is that the more one experiences the

local landscape and derives words from the immediate experience, the more accurate those words will be in approximating that natural world. As I discussed in my treatment of "Walking," such a notion is inherently contradictory because how does names are not created *ex nihilo*. Language is culture. Thoreau, himself, never intentionally gives a new label for a species; he consistently refers back to scientific labels, common names, or native names. But he continually layers these on top of each other by commenting on each label's inadequacy as a "soiled language." So, too, in "AT," Thoreau immediately follows his critique of our use of names by saying, "But of much more importance than a knowledge of names and distinctions of color is the joy and exhilaration which these bright colored leaves excite" (336). The problem is that while Thoreau may claim that the future may hope for more indigenous names, the reality is that he cannot speak them because writing/language an aspect of culture. For this reason, just as in "Walking," in his inability to write these names, he turns on the naming process itself; in other words, he examines the contingency of perception as a means to further layer his natural history.

Meditation on Naming

Thoreau concludes the essay by discussing not so much

the "tints" he has "endeavored to describe" (350), but how the reader must come (must prepare herself) for these tints in order to see them more accurately. Thoreau says:

Objects are concealed from our view, not so much because they are out of the course of our visual ray as because we do not bring our minds and eyes to bear on them We do not realize how far and widely, or how near and narrowly, we are to look. The greater part of the phenomena of Nature are for this reason concealed from us all our lives. (351)

Here again is the heart of my argument in reference to Thoreau's struggle in naming nature. His descriptions of "far and widely" and "near and narrowly" are connected to the distinctions between a transcendental scope and a later, more evolutionist, field naturalist scope. Also Thoreau's claim is not that these are amalgamated; rather they are separate methods of perception. He goes on to point out how each person's "preparation" or state of mind determines what she shall see.¹¹⁵ He says, "The gardener sees only the gardener's garden" (351), and "A botanist absorbed in the study of grasses does not distinguish the grandest Pasture Oaks" (352). This "preparation" that Thoreau is concerned with is not so much a defining character of nature (where phenomenal nature is a mere blank surface for human imagination), as it is a

¹¹⁵ See Sattlemeyer's "Introduction" xxix.

delineating tool in relative human perception (where phenomenal nature is construed only according to methodology/methodologies the observer "prepares" or uses).

Thoreau continues:

I have found that it required a different intention of the eye, in the same locality, to see different plants, even when they were closely allied, as *Junacaceae* and *Gramineae*: when I was looking for the former, I did not see the latter in the midst of them. How much more, then, it requires different intentions of the eye and of the mind to attend to different departments of knowledge! How differently the poet and the naturalist look at objects! (352)

Thoreau's goal here is not, as some have argued, to amalgamate these various perspectives into a grander perspective. The passage seems instead to suggest the opposite--that no merger is possible.¹¹⁶ These

¹¹⁶ This published passage should be contrasted with his journal entry from which it was derived:

It requires a different intention of the eye in the same locality to see different plants, as for example, *Junacaceae* and *Gramineae* even; i.e., I find that when I am looking for the former, I do not see the latter in the midst. How much more, then, it requires different intentions of the eye and of the mind to attend to different departments of knowledge! How differently the poet and the naturalist look at objects! A man sees only what concerns him. A botanist absorbed in the pursuit of grasses does not distinguish the grandest pasture oaks. He as it were tramples down oaks unwittingly in his walk.

Bidens cernua, how long? (Sept. 9, 1858)

Bidens cernua is a type of marigold that grows closely to the ground. The species name "cernua" means nodding or

"departments of knowledge" are always distinct because the scope they necessitate is different. One must attempt to "attend" to these heterogenous perspectives in order to see more accurately.¹¹⁷ Yet the passage concludes, typically, on a note of separation between poet and naturalist. Thoreau is not claiming that one is false here, but that they cannot be combined.

"AT" ends on a relatively positive note compared to "SFT" and "Walking." Thoreau reiterates the visual panoply of tints that make up the Massachusetts autumnal colors, yet also reminds the reader of the impossibility of accurately documenting such phenomena. He says, "if you undertake to make a complete list of the bright tints, it will be nearly as long as a catalogue of the plants in your vicinity" (354-55). His point is that each tint, of course, corresponds to a separate plant, and he has already discussed at length the difficulty of perceiving individual phenomena.

"with face turned toward the earth." Thoreau's question of "how long" takes into account this etymology; thus Thoreau is asking how long must one observe the earth for an accurate observation.

¹¹⁷ As I have stated earlier, I use the term "accuracy" as being at the heart of the polemics of this study. I believe that Thoreau continually acknowledges is the inaccuracy of describing the natural world. This insistence on inaccuracy is to my mind a more respectful method (ethical) of naming.

"WILD APPLES"

Thoreau first gave "Wild Apples" as a "lecture before the Concord Lyceum on February 8, 1860 ..." (*The New Thoreau* 61). "WA" is similar to "AT" in its structure and methodology: it is a less overtly nationalistic departure from European nomenclature, based on the notion of "wild" apples and the inability of Greek, Latin, and European names to describe them; it engages in the heteroglossic use of scientific labels, common names, and local or indigenous names (a much larger portion of this text than in previous natural histories); and the turning on naming itself near the end.

Nationalism

The nationalism in "WA" is certainly more ambiguous than it is in "Walking" or "AT." This ambiguity is for obvious reasons: according to nineteenth-century geology, the history of the apple tree is as long as humanity's, and a history of the cultivated apple must take into consideration its European background and subsequent introduction to American soil. Of the first concern, Thoreau begins the essay by saying:

It is remarkable how closely the history of the apple-tree is connected with that of man. The geologist tells us that the order of the Rosaceae, which includes the Apple, also the true Grasses, and the

Labiatae, or Mints, were introduced only a short time previous to the appearance of man on the globe. (356)

Thoreau follows this claim by quoting Tacitus and Niebhur as sources which validate this long connection in Roman and Greek culture. Thoreau uses the references because in discussing the history of the apple he must take into account the domestic apple. This history is, of course, intimately tied to the history of humanity, so Thoreau's use of classical and European references gives an account of the history of cultivated apples and how they got to American soil. Thoreau points out that

The cultivated apple-tree was first introduced into this country by the earliest settlers, and is thought to do as well as or better here than anywhere else.
(358)

The nationalism in "WA" comes from his eventual rejection of discussing cultivated apples in favor of wild apples. But many of the wild apples Thoreau discusses are not indigenous species (Gray's *Manual of Botany* lists only four American species); they are apple trees which have survived in deserted orchards or have been dispersed by animals (e.g. a long discussion on Thoreau's part of the connection between dispersal and survival of apple trees and cattle) in other places. What Thoreau must do to adequately name the wild apple is to examine its cultivated history. Thoreau looks further back into the natural history of a

particular object than he has done previously. Such a broader view also necessitates that he incorporate classical and European histories and etymologies, but for a different purpose than his incorporation of this material in the earlier natural histories. In those natural histories, Thoreau intends to connect the phenomena to traditional tropes in order to create homogeneous historical character. In "WA," Thoreau intends to disconnect the phenomena from the historical impositions and myths by an etymology which continually points to the contingency of the label and the distinct historical situation from which it arose--how the history may point to what we assume about the apple, not how contemporary contact with the apple repeats those previous myths in a trans-historical moment.¹¹⁸ "WA" abounds in classical references: Thoreau quotes directly from or attributes certain ideas to Homer, Herodotus, Pliny, and Palladius frequently. He also frequently refers to European authors and folktales. Yet again the listing of these histories is important only as far as they give the reader a clearer

¹¹⁸ Robert Sattlemeyer similarly says:

By giving as his opening coordinates, so to speak, not merely the genus and species of the apple, but its meaning in history, poetry, mythology, religion, and folklore, Thoreau suggests an alternative approach to customary scientific description, which involves actively putting history back into natural history. Since the reality of natural phenomena is in part dependent upon the perceiver, true natural history involves the historical perception of this perception. ("Introduction" xxxii)

understanding of how these histories have affected our ideologies of the apple. Remember, though, Thoreau's "Theme being the Wild Apple" (361), he rejects at some level this history of the cultivated apple saying:

So much for the more civilized apple-trees (*urbaniores*, as Pliny calls them). I love better to go through the old orchards of ungrafted apple-trees at what ever season of the year (367)

He also compares the hardiness of some of these cultivated apples that have survived to the hardiness of the "backwoodsman" (371). The comparison intends to note the supposed hardiness of the American character that has survived though coming from "cultivated stock" (370). Then he says, "Wilder still, as I have said, there grows elsewhere in this country a native and aboriginal Crab-Apple, *Malus coronaria*, 'whose nature has not yet been modified by cultivation'" (370). These become the focal point of the essay, but he cannot distinguish them until he has clearly defined the now wild, cultivated apple's past and clearly defined the differences between the wild, cultivated apple and the native Crab Apple. While Thoreau's nationalism is never as overt as it is in "Walking" and "AT," the essay nonetheless does have a nationalistic tone.

Labels

More than in any other published natural history, Thoreau uses scientific labels, Latin and Greek names, common names, subsections, even created names (though these will be discussed in the naming section). Again, as Thoreau begins the essay he states that the history of the apple and the history of humanity are closely connected. He then gives the reader the information that "...the order of the *Rosaceae*, which includes the Apple, also the true Grasses, and the *Labiatae*, or Mints, were introduced only a short time previous to the appearance of man ..." (356). Thoreau never clearly adopts one of these labels in preference to another. He easily moves from Tacitus' name for wild apples, "*agrestia poma*," to Michaux's *Pyrus Malus*, to Pliny's *sylvestres* for wild and *urbaniores* for cultivated, to Crab Apple followed by its scientific name "*Malus coronaria*," to common names. Unlike "AT" where Thoreau counters scientific names with common names and transcendental perceptions, in "WA" Thoreau doesn't counter or reject the scientific names. In fact, the only apples and thus names which he truly rejects are those which are cultivated. He says, "Indeed, I have no faith in the selected lists of pomological gentlemen" because the cultivated species which they name as "Favorites" or "Seek-no-further" do not have a strong taste; they "commonly turn out very tame and forgettable" (380). The apples and their

names project a commodity interest.¹¹⁹ This lack of countering names does not suggest that "WA" lacks the struggle I see in his later natural histories; rather, the struggle in "WA" manifests itself in his direct discussion of naming itself as a subsection. The subsections of "WA" are somewhat different from those in "AT" because Thoreau is not looking at a season but at a particular natural object. They are THE HISTORY OF THE APPLE-TREE, THE WILD APPLE, THE CRAB, HOW THE WILD APPLE GROWS, ITS FRUIT AND ITS FLAVOR, THEIR BEAUTY, THE NAMING OF THEM, THE LAST GLEANING, and THE "FROZEN-THAWED" APPLE. The subsections "WA" reflect not only a narrower scope but also a more inward scope (one that focuses on the history and contingency of perceiving them). Thus, Thoreau includes sections such as THE NAMING OF THEM and THE LAST GLEANING. Again, though, this focus inward is consistent with Thoreau's trajectory in the later natural histories because as Thoreau narrows his scope, so, too, does he come more

¹¹⁹ At another point, Thoreau says:

It is an old notion that, if these wild trees do not bear a valuable fruit of their own, they are the best stocks by which to transmit to posterity the most highly prized qualities of others. However, I am not in search of stocks, but the wild fruit itself, whose fierce gust has suffered no 'inteneration.' It is not my

'highest plot

To plant the Bergamot.' (378)

Thoreau's rejection of commodified views of the wild apple points to a clear rejection of utilitarian views of nature. Interestingly, though, since the cultivated apple's history is so closely aligned with that of humanity's Thoreau must take this issue into consideration in "WA."

clearly to recognize the contingency of subjectivity.

Meditation on Naming

Thoreau's subsection, THE NAMING OF THEM, typifies what I see as Thoreau's struggle with naming in his later natural histories. While in "Walking" and "AT" Thoreau examines this same issue, of accurately naming, he does not clearly separate this issue from the rest of the essay as he does in "WA."¹²⁰ He begins this section saying:

It would be a pleasant pastime to find suitable names for the hundred varieties which go to a single heap at the cider-mill. Would it not tax a man's invention,--no one to be named after a man, and all in the *lingua vernacula*? Who shall stand godfather at the christening of the wild apples? It would exhaust the Latin and Greek languages, if they were used, and make the *lingua vernacula* flag. (387)

Thoreau's first sentence suggests that such an enterprise would be pleasant enough, but then he begins to draw back from this claim. He suggests that it would not be easy, especially if the namer avoids eponyms and names in a

¹²⁰ Kevin Van Anglen claims:

Thoreau's *Wild Apples*, then, is a shorter and more deliberate attempt to rewrite the myth of the American Adam, a return to a theme which runs strongly through both *Walden* and *A Week*. (35)

But "WA" focuses so intently on history and contingency that it seems improbable that Thoreau would have so easily believed that he could speak from an Adamic language.

"*lingua vernacula*." There is a similarity to Thoreau's desire for a "*grammatica parda*" or soiled language in "Walking"--a language which inherently accepts its contingency. But even this language Thoreau suggests would not be capable of the project. This limitation Thoreau sees in a "*lingua vernacula*" suggests that he is not sanguine about the possibility that such a language could accurately name the object either. He continues:

We should have to call in the sunrise and the sunset, the rainbow and the autumn woods, and the wild flowers, and the woodpecker and the purple finch and the squirrel and the jay and the butterfly, the November traveler, and the truant boy, to our aid.

(387-88)

Certainly Thoreau desires that he could bring these conditions, species and human acts into the naming process, but his own naming which follows merely jokingly applies these as names. He obviously refers to the inaccuracy of these names, saying "I find myself compelled, after all, to give the Latin names of some for the benefit of those who live where English is not spoken,--for they are likely to have a world-wide reputation" (388). Thoreau's hyperbole is certainly intended to point out the opposite--that these names will never receive a world-wide reputation. Thus the names that follow are intended, to my mind, to point to the impossibility of accurate naming. He

says:

There is, first of all, the Wood-Apple (*Malus sylvatica*); the Blue-Jay Apple; the Apple which grows in Dells in the Woods (*sylvatica*), also in Hollows in Pastures (*campestrivallis*); the Apple the grows in an old Cellar-Hole (*Malus cellaris*); the Meadow-Apple; the Partridge-Apple; the Truant's Apple (*cessatoris*), which no boy will ever go by without knocking off some, however late it may be; the Saunterer's Apple,-- you must lose yourself before you can find the way to that (388)

First of all, these are not separate species. They are wild apples which are encountered in different situations. Thoreau's list is intended to have a mock natural history quality. After all, the natural histories which used the natural system of classification had to use glossaries and addendums which looked similar to Thoreau's list.¹²¹ Many of the names in his list are highly mimetic. These are named not with an eponym but by an action that one does when encountering them. If Thoreau is being at all serious, he seems to be saying that the names applied to objects should reflect the condition in which we most frequently encounter them, or more so the appropriate preparation that one must take in order to encounter them

¹²¹ See Chapter 2 for a longer discussion of these glossaries and addendums.

more closely.¹²² But Thoreau does not claim that these are accurate names. He concludes this section by writing:

As Bodaeus exclaims, referring to the cultivated lands, and adapting Virgil to his case, so I, adapting Bodaeus,--

'Not if I had a hundred tongues, a hundred mouths,
An iron voice, could I describe all the forms
And reckon up all the names of these *wild apples*.'

(389)

Thoreau's point here is to say that his naming is inadequate--that the preparation and perception in which one encounters these wild apples will necessarily demand a new name. Note, too, though he is using an historic writer to illustrate a similar inability to name, he is not using this writer to reaffirm a trans-historical moment. Here he

¹²² This interest in preparation is similar to that in his previous two natural histories. He says:

These apples have hung in the wind and frost and rain till they have absorbed the qualities of the weather or season, and thus are highly *seasoned*, and they *pierce* and *sting* and *permeate* us with their spirit. They must be eaten in *season*, accordingly,--that is out-of-doors. (383)

The significance of preparation is that it determines the perception of the natural object. One cannot desire the taste of a cultivated apple when eating a wild apple. But Thoreau goes further in his claim, saying that one must also be out-of-doors to appreciate wild apples because indoors our expectations and surroundings cannot fully appreciate the wild apple. He continues:

It takes a wild or savage taste to appreciate a wild fruit. So there is one *thought* for the field, another for the house. I would have my thoughts, like wild apples, to be food for walkers, and will not warrant them to be palatable if tasted in the house. (385)

must "adapt" Bodaeus for his purposes, not imitate.

Thoreau concludes "WA" in the tone of a jeremiad. He laments:

The era of the Wild Apple will soon be past. It is a fruit which will probably become extinct in New England. You may still wander through old orchards of native fruit of great extent, which for the most part went to the cider-mill, now all gone to decay. (394)

Much like the passage in "Walking"--"In Wildness is the preservation of the World"--the jeremiad conclusion laments not only the loss of the phenomenal wild apple but also the loss of the "wild" condition and preparation the perceiver must have to see them. This "wild" preparation manifests itself in the essay in Thoreau's playful names for apples as well as the heteroglossic perspectives/labels (scientific, Latin, Greek, and common). Robert Sattlemeyer claims of "WA":

... To know a natural object--the apple tree in 'Wild Apples,' for example--requires more than fixing its genus and species and being able to identify its varieties; it involves tracing, as Thoreau does in the beginning of that essay, the history of the apple tree's association with man, giving the sum of its histories, so to speak, and attempting to write a diachronic natural science in which the discoveries of present day do not invalidate but rather take their

place in succession with those of the past.

(Sattlemeyer, *Thoreau's Reading* 91)

Sattlemeyer's claim encompasses much of what I have been doing in this chapter: pointing to Thoreau's histories and etymologies as his search for accurate names. Where I would disagree with Sattlemeyer is that I see this essay less as a "diachronic natural science" and more as a "heteroglossic natural science," for Thoreau never comes to a point where he feels satisfied with his etymologies and histories. Instead, he continually points to their inadequacies and his own. He focuses on preparation suggesting that there is no "natural" methodology of perception but "wildness" or the inability to define it.

Conclusion

Thoreau's last natural histories, other than "Life Without Principle," mark the last published works of his life. He wrote to Myron Benton, "if I were to live [longer], I should have much to report on Natural History generally," and certainly the manuscripts for *The Dispersion of Seeds* suggest just that. His reading and journals during these last years also reflect Thoreau's intense study and cataloguing of local flora and fauna, and these natural histories certainly show Thoreau's increasing knowledge of the natural sciences: his use of scientific labels and his more systematic discussion (the natural

system classification) of the objects. Yet these essays do not represent the common natural histories of Thoreau's day; Thoreau intended for his natural histories to address not only the natural object but also the perception by which we see these objects. Thoreau's last essays point to his desire to create a language in which the object and the representation of the object become immediate and intimate, yet the essays typically reflect his inability achieve such a language. As he recognizes the inaccuracy of each label through etymology and history, he pulls away from it and replaces it with another label. This constant pulling away eventually turns on itself, and Thoreau then begins to examine the naming process itself.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

I am interested in each contemporary plant in my vicinity, and have attained to a certain acquaintance with the larger ones. They are cohabitants with me of this part of the planet, and they bear familiar names. Yet how essentially wild they are! as wild, really, as those strange fossil plants whose impressions I see on my coal. Yet I can imagine that some race gathered those too with as much admiration, and knew them as intimately as I do these, that even they served for a language of the sentiments. Stigmariae stood for a human sentiment in that race's flower language. Chickweed, or a pine is but little less wild. I assume to be acquainted with these, but what ages between me and the tree whose shade I enjoy! It is as if it stood substantially in a remote geological period. (June 5, 1857, Journal)

The naturalist's mission as Thoreau finally expressed it went far beyond the naming of the products of the New World garden. (Sattlemeyer, "Introduction" xxxiv)

Most Thoreau scholars prefer to address his naming processes as either the pointless, amateurish ramblings of a nineteenth-century popular natural history writer or as Thoreau's revelations through transcendentalism. Joan Burbick concludes *Thoreau's Alternative Histories* by saying:

Fraught with danger, this attempt to rescue history, often leads to the maze of perception and the doubling of self, landscape, and eye. Outside of chronology, this New World signifies not only a constant regeneration, but creativity itself, where description finally turns into revelation, and history participates in the sacred. (150)

Burbick's insight into Thoreau's descriptions is superb, assessing the methodology as a "maze" and a "doubling." But like other critics she also feels the need to subsume

these heteroglossic tendencies within a paradigm of intention. While Thoreau may have had such intentions in mind, the literary product readers are left with does not reflect a Thoreau whose paradigm of intention or literary methodology is at ease or finalized.

Thoreau died not long before his forty-fifth birthday; natural sciences were at a period of enormous change; his understanding and studies of the natural sciences were serious but not ground-breaking (he had only taken up serious study for some twelve years); his last natural histories reflect drastic changes from his earlier natural histories both in terms of their ideologies and their methodologies; and he died before his plans for a larger natural history (*The Dispersion of Seeds*) could be shaped into a text.

What seems important, yet mostly ignored, is that Thoreau was a human whose notions, ideologies, and literary products were in flux. What seems to be missing in much Thoreau scholarship, particularly in reference to his descriptions of nature, is an understanding that it is unlikely that Thoreau ever came to a singular decision about the purpose of natural history or a correct method of description. For this reason, scholars have pointlessly argued that Thoreau was either wholly "scientific" or "poetic"; yet they ignore (purposely or not) those methods which contradict their theses. Those who emphasize the

scientific disregard Thoreau's insistent claims that he is a transcendentalist or his references to natural phenomena as symbols for humanity, whereas those who emphasize the poetic disregard the increasing catalogue of scientific names and his meticulous notes and measurements.

For this dissertation, what is most important in Thoreau's natural histories is the gap between the name and the natural object, of the distance between ideology and wilderness, and the polyphony and heteroglossic quality of his later natural descriptions. I do not believe that Thoreau came to a final decision about natural history writing--naming. His was a process in the making. The greater part of his work in this genre is yet unpublished. Thoreau was not fully confident about his role as a natural historian (as a namer of the landscape). I am not claiming that he did not believe in the possibility of a merger between poet and naturalist, but that the texts and journals suggest a Thoreau not at ease with either these roles or a merger. Thoreau did focus on etymologies and local histories as a way of subverting the facade of scientific nomenclature and objective observation, but Thoreau's late natural history writing turns inward on the process of observation itself because Thoreau inevitably recognized the gap between label and object. His turn inward then becomes a meditation on the problem of perception and subjectivity.

I hope that I have demonstrated Thoreau's discomfort with his literary product, his recognition that he can not "nail words to their primitive senses." For example, in the first epigraph to this conclusion, Thoreau says:

I am interested in each contemporary plant in my vicinity, and have attained to a certain acquaintance with the larger ones. They are cohabitants with me of this part of the planet, and they bear familiar names. He knows the phenomena intellectually and physically. He recognizes them and can label them. But note how the tenor of the passage changes: "Yet how essentially wild they are! as wild, really, as those strange fossil plants whose impressions I see on my coal." He distances himself from the objects, pointing to their wildness. Thoreau's claim for their wildness is his acknowledgement of the gap between labels/names and the object. As Gary Snyder says, "*Wild* is largely defined in our dictionaries by what--from a human standpoint--it is not" ("The Etiquette of Freedom" 9). Thoreau then attempts to recover from this distancing by an imaginative leap:

Yet I can imagine that some race gathered those too with as much admiration, and knew them as intimately as I do these, that even they served for a language of the sentiments. *Stigmariae* stood for a human sentiment in that race's flower language.

Here, Thoreau's supposed recovery of a "race's flower

language" hinges on his method of perception being similar to the ancient race's. Yet Thoreau concludes this passage not with a romantic/transcendental moment of unity, but with a recognition of the distance between the object and his language and of his inability to achieve a similar perception:

Chickweed, or a pine is but little less wild. I assume to be acquainted with these, but what ages between me and the tree whose shade I enjoy! It is as if it stood substantially in a remote geological period. (June 5, 1857, Journal)

While Thoreau may cling to a primitivist notion of an ancient "natural language," his own work suggests his frustration in attempting to achieve this language.

What is important to recognize in Thoreau's natural histories and descriptions is that they depict not a static Thoreau who continually subsumes nature into a transcendental moment, but a Thoreau who was a dynamic, questioning individual. The lack of synthesis in Thoreau's later natural histories shows his growing awareness of the limits of language for accurately describing the natural world. This awareness points to a more ethical (more respectful) method of naming nature, which consistently acknowledges the contingency of subjectivity and perception, and which I believe is inherently more ecological.

Chapter VII

Afterword

"Man gave names to all the animals in the beginning, in the beginning. Man gave names to all the animals in the beginning, long time ago." (Bob Dylan, "Man Gave Names to All the Animals")

"In most books, the I, is omitted; in this it will be retained ; that, in respect to egotism, is the main difference. We commonly do not remember that it is, after all, always the first person that is speaking." (Thoreau, *Walden*)

"Names reflect the ways we perceive a creature. As I write in the book [*PrairyErth*], once we all become nomenclaturors of a place--once we invent our own names for creatures--we'll find our own relationship with them." (William Least Heat Moon, "Interview")

"SUBVERT THE DOMINANT PARADIGM" (Chicago Earth First! bumper sticker)

This is dubious stuff--the insertion of "I" in a dissertation when the author really means self and not the fictitious dissertation scholar. Yet within the context of this dissertation and within the delicate connection between narration, natural description, and phenomenal nature that Thoreau gently examined, this study would be somehow less precise without it.

I use the adverb "gently" in reference to Thoreau's understanding of descriptions of nature because the polemic of my dissertation is derived from Thoreau's concern with accuracy. Is this study an ecological piece? I hope that it is. I cannot believe that this study accomplishes much if does not affect me, if Thoreau's intense sensitivity to the connections between language/description and the phenomenal world becomes the object of an agile literary criticism dance but fails to challenge my own dullness toward those connections.

I think that it is not so much the practice of naming (language demands it) that has shaped many of our environmentally hazardous ideologies but the lack of care and retrospect with which this naming is done. Word-names wield enormous power, for the names of things cannot be separated from the human perception of the object--language pervades our very experience. Most of us are manipulated by the names we have inherited in our relation to the phenomenal world. We classify and categorize the phenomenal world much like unwitting natural historians; we see things as though they are what names call them, where taxonomic systems determine viewpoint, focus, and relation. We speak of the phenomenal world dangerously. We speak or write names and descriptions without gentleness, without examining the embedded narratives/histories/paradigms in their syllables.

"SUBVERT THE DOMINANT PARADIGM" Does this dissertation? This dissertation has used more than 2500 pages of paper in its production; this dissertation has used thousands of hours of electricity on the computer, the copy machine, and lighting (in Knoxville power comes from that eco-enemy TVA); this dissertation has burnt up hundreds of gallons of fossil fuel getting to and from school, the library, and travel to antiquarian libraries; and this naive view is taking into account only the obvious harmful effects. How easily one can extract the "I" in

these situations.

"SUBVERT THE DOMINANT PARADIGM" Do I? I used this paper; I used this electricity; I drove the car. I proliferated words on pages, and these pages, when all of us are being honest, will most likely be ignored on a shelf. I have reinforced "the dominant paradigm" in material ways, and I have reinforced "the dominant paradigm" in ideological ways. I am not subverting the doctoral process (which is certainly a "dominant paradigm"); I fulfilled the requirements with a smile and avoided trouble whenever possible. I am not subverting Thoreau criticism (which is certainly a "dominant paradigm"); as a matter of fact, my methodology reinforces a kind of academic approach to Thoreau.

"SUBVERT THE DOMINANT PARADIGM" Can we? The bumpersticker (note that it assumes you have bumper to stick it on and probably a car attached) uses oil-based inks on a non-recyclable plastic-coated material, which is backed with a non-naturally occurring adhesive, and has a non-recyclable paper backing. How many "PARADIGMS" profited by this bumpersticker production? But this isn't the only question concerning the bumpersticker. How can I say "SUBVERT THE DOMINANT PARADIGM" unless I am speaking from that "dominant paradigm"? The very words themselves participate in the "dominant paradigm" in order to be understood: subversion and dominance--highly charged words

in America that evoke either patriotism or communism. The word "paradigm" harks back to its classical roots and contemporary highbrow status.

Is this is an ecological piece? I hope that it is. But I refrain from calling it an ecological piece for the same reason I will not say "SUBVERT THE DOMINANT PARADIGM"; I am fearful of the ramifications of such a claim; I am fearful of the dangers in those words. If this work can have any effect, the change that can take place as a result of this awareness of naming must be the result of the tenuous connection that exists between ideology and action (a **very tenuous** connection). I believe in the distinctness of phenomenal experience in those areas which suggest less human intervention (the wild). The more we--as namers of the wild--are willing to see the inaccuracy of labels, the more we become more careful namers and re-namers of the wild. I conclude this dissertation with a poem I have written from these concerns.

"Earthy Dynamism"
(for Henry David Thoreau)

The early fortification walls at Tiryns and other Mycenaean sites, built of unhewn or roughly dressed stone, were called cyclopean by later Greeks, who imagined them to have been built by that mythical race of giants. (101 Gardner, *Art Through the Ages*).

Monoliths of word/things "fortifi"-creation WITHOUT MORTAR. CYCLOpean stones of cut past for a new fit--a new wall, (re)-dressed of old phenomena. Action/Verbs as created through consistent use.

"THE TERM FRAGMENT REFERS TO A GROUP OF WORDS BEGINNING WITH A CAPITAL LETTER AND ENDING WITH A PERIOD." (28 HARBRACE HANDBOOK 11TH ED.)

The rough appearance of these cyclopean structures is most impressive in its crude monumentality; it possesses an earthy dynamism not found in other, more sophisticated ancient architectural styles. (Gardner's *Art Through the Ages* 101-2)

New\old\dead\alive\mechanic\organic--(a)-live.

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